

CREAMED CHESTNUT SOUP

Servings: 6-8



"We make this a few times a year in Fall and Winter as comfort food; it's an easy soup and tastes good."

PREPARATION:

1. In a large pot over medium heat, cook bacon crisp, 8 minutes or so. Remove bacon to a paper towel-lined plate, reserving exactly 1 teaspoon of bacon fat to sauté the vegetables. Using the same pot, melt the butter with the reserved bacon fat, and add the carrot, celery, leek, and shallot. Season with a healthy pinch of salt and 8 grinds of fresh pepper. Cook over medium heat until softened and translucent, 10 minutes.
2. Add broth, water and chestnuts to the pot. Cover, bring to a boil then adjust to a low simmer and cook for 60 minutes to fully soften the chestnuts.
3. While the soup simmers, make the nutmeg crème fraîche. Put 2 oz of crème fraîche in a small bowl and stir in fresh nutmeg to taste, about 1/8 teaspoon is typical for us. Cover and keep in the fridge until serving time.
4. Purée the soup in batches in a blender until very smooth. Return the puréed soup to the pot and reheat to boiling. Remove from the heat, add the remaining 2 oz of crème fraîche, and whisk it in thoroughly. Add the vinegar - use some precision, you don't want to overdo it.
5. Season the soup with salt a half-teaspoon at a time, whisking and tasting between additions. Then grind in some fresh black pepper and ladle into warmed shallow bowls. Garnish with the crisp bacon bits, a dab of nutmeg crème fraîche, some chive snippets and perhaps a touch of fresh nutmeg or a little drizzle of olive oil.

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 slices thick-cut bacon, sliced into 1/2 inch pieces
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 carrot, sliced
- 1 celery stalk, sliced
- 1 small white onion (or 1/2 a large one), chopped medium
- 1 large shallot, halved and sliced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- 4 cups low-sodium chicken broth plus 1 cup of water
- 1 pound whole roasted chestnuts (jarred, or packets)
- 4 oz crème fraîche
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon Sherry vinegar
- Crème fraîche, snipped chives, olive oil and grated nutmeg, for garnish

"You'll note in the recipe that I specify reserving exactly 1 teaspoon of the bacon fat, to use with the butter for sautéing the vegetables. That's not a casual amount; that 1 teaspoon is enough to give the delicate chestnut soup a noticeable bacon flavor, and more bacon fat will overwhelm the chestnut flavor. Similarly, use only 1/2 teaspoon of Sherry vinegar, it is strongly flavored stuff!"

Optional step: Sieve the puréed soup through a fine mesh before adding the crème fraîche. Sometimes chestnuts can have little fibers in them that give soup a grainy texture. Sometimes you catch nothing in the sieve, sometimes there's a few tablespoons of chestnut fibers. It's a bit of work to sieve the soup but we don't mind; and it makes the texture so much silkier."

– Tim Slater

*Suggested Wine Pairing:
Sarah's Vineyard Pinot Noir*

