

# Superb squash soup with the best Parmesan croutons



This fantastic soup is best made with varieties of squash that have dense, orange flesh, such as butternut or onion squash. It's important to use good chicken stock and season the soup well to bring out the nutty, sweet flavour of the squash. Once you've mastered this recipe, you can take the soup in different ways by adding pearl barley, dried pasta, or some chopped smoked bacon. Even the smallest amount of dried porcini. PS I made this in my pressure cooker the other day, with really great results – it's so quick!

**Serves 8**

## Nutritional Information (amount per serving)

Calories	Carbs	Sugar	Fat	Saturates	Protein
527kcal	47.3g	19.3g	24.1g	9.8g	27.4g

**Ingredients**

**Method**

- olive oil
- 16 fresh sage leaves
- 2 red onions, peeled and chopped
- 2 sticks celery, trimmed and chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary, leaves picked
- 1½ - 1 fresh red chilli, to taste, deseeded and finely chopped
- sea salt
- freshly ground black pepper
- 2 kg butternut squash, onion squash or musque de Provence, halved, deseeded and cut into chunks
- 2 litres organic chicken or vegetable stock
- extra virgin olive oil

Put a very large saucepan on a medium heat and pour in a couple of lugs of olive oil. Add the sage leaves and fry for around 30 seconds or until dark green and crisp. Quickly remove them with a slotted spoon to a bowl lined with kitchen paper – you'll use these for sprinkling over at the end. In the pan you'll be left with a beautifully flavoured oil, so put it back on the heat and throw in your onion, celery, carrot, garlic, rosemary leaves, chilli and a good pinch of salt and pepper. Cook gently for about 10 minutes until the vegetables are sweet and soft. Add the squash and the stock to the pan, bring to the boil and simmer for around half an hour.

While the soup is cooking, make your croutons. Drizzle a little olive oil over the ciabatta slices, pat it in and press some grated Parmesan on to each side. Place in a non-stick pan without any oil and fry until golden on both sides.

When the squash is soft and cooked through, whiz the soup with a hand blender or pour it into a liquidizer and pulse until you have a smooth purée (but you can leave it slightly chunky if you like). Most importantly, remember to taste and season it until it's perfect. Divide the soup between your bowls, placing 2 croutons on top of each. Sprinkle with a few of your crispy sage leaves and drizzle with a swirl of good-quality extra virgin olive oil.

## For The Croutons

- 16 slices ciabatta bread
- 1 block Parmesan cheese, for grating

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