

Butternut Squash Soup and Narrow Gate wines

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By Kathryn Reed

Ingredients I don't know and complex steps are two reasons for me to ditch a recipe. Even though the recipe below looks complicated, it's not. The work involved will have those at the table begging for more.

Because the recipe makes so much, we were happy to be eating it for the better part of a week. Sue took some to work for Hedy. The three of us rate it as one of the best soups we've ever had. We have Teena Hildebrand of Narrow Gate Vineyards in Placerville to thank for this fabulous ensemble of flavors.

"I traditionally make a seasonal soup for many of our wine pairing events and personal dinner parties. It's a great way to start the evening and an opportunity to show off white wines," Hildebrand said. "I put all of my favorite flavors (looking for a balance of sweet, salt, acid, etc.) that will highlight, rather than flatten, the flavors in the wine. The slightly natural sweetness from the seasonal vegetables and the intensity of the fresh apple cider reduction balanced the pungent, nutty, savoriness of the fresh sage leaves crisped in brown butter."

I swung by the winery during the annual Barrel Tasting festivities that were going on throughout El Dorado County the weekend of Jan. 24-25. There I was able to taste some of the wines Hildebrand recommends for this flavorful soup.

Now I will be able to pour a glass or two of the Melange del Sol Blanc when I make this soup again. We'll see how long the

bottles last. I may have to go back during another fun event – Passport Weekend (March 28-29 and April 4-5). Of course wineries are happy to have people visit on non-event days as well.

Hildebrand isn't for giving up on white wines in winter.

“There are so many wonderful, seasonal dishes that really bring out the warmth, white floral aromas (orange blossom, plumeria, honeysuckle) orchard flavors (sweet, ripe, late harvest apples) and spice that are characteristic of the white Rhone varietals like Narrow Gate Vineyards' 2007 Estate Viognier Roussanne,” Hildebrand boasts. “This pairing is a sensory explosion and a delicious ushering in of winter.”

Hildebrand also suggests serving Narrow Gate Vineyards' Chardonnay, Melange de Sol Blanc (blend of Chardonnay, Viognier and Roussanne) and Cotes Rose (Grenache Rose) with this soup.

She uses homemade veggie stock and says it makes a world of difference. I used store bought and was more than satisfied. All the comments below are from Hildebrand.

Butternut Squash, Golden Delicious Apple & Sweet Potato Soup

8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter, divide into 2T and 6T

2½ lbs butternut squash, peeled, seeded, cut into ½ inch pieces (about 6 cups)

1 lb sweet potato or yam, roasted and removed from skin

2 cups chopped white or yellow onion

1/2 cup chopped carrot

1/2 cup chopped celery

2 small golden delicious apples, peeled, cored, chopped

1½ teaspoons dried thyme or 1 tablespoon fresh

½ teaspoon crumbled dried sage leaves or 1 teaspoon fresh

6+ cups vegetable stock (can also use chicken stock)

1½ cups fresh or unfiltered apple cider (I use Boa Vista unpasteurized from Apple Hill)

2/3 cup creme fraiche (can substitute good quality sour cream)

½ cup heavy whipping cream (optional, can also use half&half or tempered sour cream)

12 to 24 fresh small (1/2-inch long) sage leaves

Melt 6T butter in a heavy large stock pot or saucepan over medium-high heat. Add butternut squash, sweet potatoes, onions, carrots and celery; saute until slightly softened, about 15 minutes. Mix in chopped golden delicious apples, dried thyme and dried sage. Add stock and 1 cup of the cider; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low. Cover and simmer until squash and apples are tender, stirring mixture occasionally, about 30 minutes. Remove from burner and cool.

Puree soup in blender, food processor or with a hand held stick blender to a smooth consistency. Return soup to stock pot or saucepan and whisk in ½ cup whipping cream, thin with more stock if too thick. Season with sea salt and white pepper (optional).

Apple Cider reduction Creme Fraiche:

Boil remaining ½ cup of cider until reduced to ¼ cup. Cool. Place creme fraiche in small bowl and whisk in reduced cider.

Crispy Sage leaves in Brown Butter

Melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter in a small saute pan over med-high heat. Heat until butter just starts to brown (do not burn) and add fresh sage leaves, cook until crisp and remove

to paper towel lined plate.

Bring soup to a simmer, ladle into bowls, drizzle with apple cider reduction creme fraiche and top with a crispy brown butter sage leaf.

Soup and apple cider creme fraiche can be made up to 3 days in advance, covered separately and refrigerated.