

Pumpkin-White Bean Soup with Pomegranate Crema

This pumpkin-and-white bean soup is drizzled with pomegranate cream and sprinkled with the fruit's jewellike seeds.

Pumpkin-White Bean Soup

5 cups chicken stock_
3/4 cup white pinto (cannellini) beans, soaked overnight and drained_
1 pumpkin (3 to 4 pounds)_
1 1/2 teaspoons corn oil_
4 ounces bacon, diced_
1/2 medium yellow onion, diced_
1 stalk celery, diced_
1 small carrot, diced_
1/2 red bell pepper, seeded and diced_
1/2 yellow bell pepper, seeded and diced_
1 clove garlic, minced_
1 tablespoon fresh thyme, chopped_
1/4 cup dry white wine_ salt to taste_
1/4 cup fresh chives, chopped_
1 cup roasted garlic-chile croutons (recipe follows)_
3/4 cup pomegranate crema (recipe follows)_
pomegranate seeds

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bring 1 cup of chicken stock to a boil and add soaked beans. Lower heat and simmer for 30 to 45 minutes, until tender. Set aside. Meanwhile, quarter and seed pumpkin. Place 3 pieces, skin side down, on a cookie sheet and bake for 30 to 45 minutes, until slightly tender. Peel reserved piece and cut into 1/4-inch pieces. Boil and cook diced pumpkin about 1 minute, until tender. Have a bowl of ice water ready. Drain boiled diced pumpkin and plunge into ice water. When cool, drain and set aside. Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add bacon and cook for 1 minutes. Add onion, celery, carrot, bell pepper, garlic, and thyme. Cook for 3 to 5 minutes, until vegetables become translucent. Add wine and remove pan from heat.

Remove skin and remaining fiber from baked pumpkin. Cut into pieces and add to vegetables. Return pan to heat, add remaining 4

cups chicken stock, and simmer for 45 minutes. Transfer to a food processor or blender and purée. Strain, place in a clean saucepan, and heat thoroughly, adding reserved diced pumpkin, beans, and salt at the end.

To serve, garnish each bowl with chives, croutons, and pomegranate crema and seeds. Serves 8.

Pomegranate Crema

1 pomegranate_
1/2 cup sour cream or yogurt

Quarter pomegranate, reserving seeds of 1 section to garnish soup. Juice the 3 remaining sections and cook over medium heat for about 5 minutes, until reduced to a syrupy glaze. Cool, then in a mixing bowl, whisk together with sour cream or yogurt. Makes 1/2 cup.

Roasted Garlic-Chile Croutons

4 slices French or sourdough bread_
3 tablespoons olive oil_
salt to taste_
1 tablespoon roasted garlic, puréed_
2 tablespoons pure chile powder (not prepared chili seasoning)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Remove crust and cut bread into 1/2-inch cubes. Combine olive oil, salt, and garlic purée in a mixing bowl and add croutons, tossing thoroughly. Place on a cookie sheet and bake for 5 to 7 minutes, until golden brown. Transfer to a bowl, sprinkle with chile powder, and toss. Makes about 1 cup.