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Thai-Style Pumpkin Soup with Coriander Pesto

*Infused with coconut and a hearty dose of heat from the Thai red curry paste, this recipe, adapted from the cookbook **5 of the BEST** by Valli Little, takes pumpkin soup to a whole new level. The coriander pesto tones down the heat a bit while adding a bright fresh flavor to the dish.*

2 bunches fresh coriander, roots and stems trimmed off with a few leaves reserved for garnish
zest and juice of one lemon
2 garlic cloves
4 tablespoons olive oil
1 large yellow onion, chopped
2 teaspoons finely grated fresh ginger
1 tablespoon Thai red curry paste (see notes in recipe about adding this to the soup)
1 culinary pumpkin or butternut squash, 2 pounds in weight, peeled and cut into small cubes (See note at bottom for using pumpkin or squash puree)
2 cups vegetable broth
14 ounce can of light coconut milk
Thinly sliced red onion to garnish

Place the coriander, zest, lemon juice, and garlic in a food processor. Turn the food processor on and slowly add 3 tablespoons of the olive oil to make a pesto with a sauce consistency. Add a little warm water if you need to thin it a bit. Let this sit while you make the soup. You may need to re-blend it at serving time.

Heat the remaining tablespoon of olive oil in a large soup pot over medium high heat and add the onion. Stir for one minute; add the ginger and ONE TEASPOON of the curry paste. Reserve the remaining curry paste to add to the finished soup if you want more heat once you've tasted the final product. Stir for one minute.

Add the broth and pumpkin cubes and bring to a boil. Turn the heat down and simmer for 15 minutes or until the pumpkin is soft. Remove the pot from the heat and, using an immersion blender, puree the soup.

Return the pot to the heat, add the extra curry paste to taste, pour in the coconut milk and gently heat through over a low heat. Do NOT bring back up to a boil.

Pour the soup into a large serving bowl and garnish with the pesto, reserved coriander, and red onion slices. Serve immediately.

Serves 4-6.

Victoria Wesseler

Note: If you have pumpkin or butternut squash puree in the freezer, thaw it out and add it to the onion mixture with the broth, bring the soup up to a boil, simmer for 10 minutes, add the coconut milk, garnish and serve immediately.

* To make fresh pumpkin puree, heat the oven to 400 degrees. Line a rimmed baking sheet with non-stick foil and spray it with cooking spray. Cut a sugar pumpkin in half and remove the seeds and stringy interior (ornamental pumpkins will not work for the recipe—be sure to buy a sugar pumpkin, sometimes referred to as a pie pumpkin, for culinary use). Lay the pumpkin halves cut side down on the foil and spray the skin side of the pumpkins with cooking spray. Bake for 45 minutes or until the pumpkins can be easily pierced with a fork. Remove from the oven and let the pumpkins cool completely. Scoop out the pulp and puree in a food processor. You should get a cup of puree for every pound of pumpkin. You can use the same method to make butternut squash puree.

Recipe Credit: **5 of the BEST: Celebrating Five Years of the World's Best Food Magazine**