



Winter Squash Soup- Percy Watley, executive chef at The Ahwahnee in Yosemite Valley, CA

Ingredients:

Olive oil

1 winter squash (about 2 1/2 pounds), such as acorn, butternut, kabocha, sugar pumpkin, blue pumpkin, turban or hubbard, halved and seeded

4 ounces (1 stick, 1/2 cup) butter

1 yellow onion, diced

1 leek, white part only, diced

1 tablespoons grated fresh ginger

Kosher salt

1 large russet potato, peeled and diced

8 cups homemade chicken stock

2 bay leaves

1 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves

1 cup heavy cream

Black pepper in a mill

Small celery leaves, for garnish



Directions:

To make the soup: Preheat the oven to 400 F. Lightly brush a sheet pan with olive oil and set the squash, cut side down, on it. Brush the skin of the squash with olive oil and bake until very tender, about 45 minutes, or longer depending on the variety. Remove from the oven and cool. Separate the cooked squash from the skin and discard the skin. Set aside.

Melt the butter in a large saucepan or soup pot set over medium heat; add the onion, leek and ginger, lower the heat and cook slowly until soft, fragrant and translucent, about 20 minutes. Do not let brown. Season with salt.

Add the potato, squash purée, stock, bay leaves and thyme and increase the heat to high. When the stock boils, reduce the heat to low and simmer gently for 30 minutes, until the potato is very tender and the flavors have come together. Cool slightly; use tongs to remove and discard the bay leaves.

Purée the soup with an immersion blender or pass it through a food mill fitted with the smallest blade. Strain through a fine sieve into a clean saucepan. Stir in the cream, set over medium heat and heat through; do not let the soup boil again. Taste, correct for salt and season generously with black pepper.

To serve: Place 2 slices of pork belly in 6 warmed soup plates. Ladle in the soup, garnish and serve. Serves 6 to 8.