

Salt and Serenity

Roasted Tomato-Chipotle Soup with Grilled Cheese Croutons

The basil oil for drizzling onto the finished soup is completely optional. I think it makes for a beautiful presentation, but feel free to leave it out and just garnish with thinly sliced fresh basil leaves instead.

Serves 4 -6

Soup:

2 kilograms ripe tomatoes (I used a mix of plum tomatoes and heirloom tomatoes), halved
6 shallots, peeled and halved
4 large cloves garlic, NOT peeled
2 Tablespoons olive oil
2 teaspoons Diamond Crystal Kosher salt
½ teaspoon black pepper
2 sprigs fresh thyme
12 basil leaves
½ -1 [chipotle pepper in adobo](#), seeds removed*
¾ cup vegetable stock
⅔ cup heavy whipping cream
1 Tablespoon honey
2 teaspoons sherry or red wine vinegar

Basil Oil:

50 grams fresh basil leaves
25 grams fresh spinach leaves
160 grams neutral oil (such as canola or sunflower)

Grilled Cheese Croutons:

8 slices country white bread
4 Tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
6 ounces medium cheddar cheese, thinly sliced or grated

1. **Make soup:** Preheat oven to 400°F. Place tomato halves, shallot halves, unpeeled garlic cloves, thyme sprigs and basil leaves onto a rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper and using your hands, toss well, so that everything is coated evenly. Rearrange tomatoes so that they are skin side up. This makes for easier removal of the peels once everything is roasted. Tuck garlic cloves under tomatoes so that they are protected and don't blacken too much.
2. Roast for 30-40 minutes until tomatoes slump and their skins just start to get dark. Let cool for a about 15 minutes and then use your fingers to pull the skins off the tomatoes. Discard skins and thyme sprigs. Squeeze roasted garlic out of their skins and discard skins.
3. Transfer contents of baking sheet to blender. Start blender on low speed and process for about 1 minute. Add ½ chipotle pepper. Continue blending until smooth. Taste and add additional salt and more chipotle if you want it spicier. Transfer soup to large pot.
4. Whisk in vegetable stock and cream. Add honey and vinegar. Mix well and taste. Soup can be made a day ahead and chilled. Reheat on low, until hot, before serving.

5. **Make basil oil:** Place basil, spinach, and oil into blender. Blend for 2-3 minutes until very smooth. Line a fine mesh strainer with a single layer of cheesecloth. Set strainer over a large bowl. Strain basil oil. Discard basil/spinach solids.
6. **Make grilled cheese croutons:** Spread butter on one side of each of the slices of bread.
7. Heat a large skillet (cast iron if you have it) over medium heat. Add two slices of bread to pan, butter side down. Cover each slice with $\frac{1}{4}$ of the cheese and top with 2 slices of bread, buttered side up. Turn heat down to low and cover pan, to assist with melting the cheese. Let cook for 2-3 minutes, turn sandwiches, and cook on second side until golden brown. Repeat with remaining bread and cheese.
8. Let sandwiches cool for a few minutes. Using a serrated knife, trim crusts off bread and cut each sandwich into 1-inch croutons. The trimmed pieces are the chefs treat!
9. **Serving:** Spoon soup into bowls, drizzle with basil oil, if using, and top with croutons. Serve immediately.

*Chipotle peppers in adobo sauce come in a small can. Each can contains about 10-12 peppers. I never use them all in one recipe. Here is what I do to keep the leftovers fresh. Remove peppers from can and over a bowl, scrape out as many seeds as you can from the middle of each pepper. Discard seeds. I find them too spicy with the seeds. Place deseeded peppers and the adobo sauce into food processor and whiz until smooth. Spread puree out on a parchment lined baking sheet. Freeze puree until solid. Break puree into a few pieces and store in freezer in a Ziploc bag. Just break off a little piece whenever you need it.