

pumpkin soup with coconut, peanuts, and scallions

{ B. T. NGUYEN }

SERVES 4

Pumpkins are not just for jack-o'-lanterns and pies. Good choices for cooking are sugar pumpkins and heirloom varieties such as the gray-skinned Jarrahdale, the white-skinned Cucurbita, or a delicious cheese pumpkin that has a pale orange skin. When selecting a pumpkin, remember that a fresh pumpkin or squash will be a lot easier to peel and more flavorful than one that's been on the shelves for a while.

Cody and I play guessing games when cutting up fruits and squashes about what color the insides will be. This is a warm, comforting soup and the peanut and scallion garnish livens it up for older children and adults and adds a welcome and surprising crunch. Use less broth or water to make a thicker puree that is more like baby food.

4 cups vegetable or chicken broth
3 cups pumpkin (½ small pumpkin—approximately 2 pounds) or butternut squash, peeled and cut into 2-inch cubes
⅓ cup sliced galangal (see note at right)
8 ounces coconut milk
2 tablespoons soy sauce, Maggi or other quality brand
1½ teaspoons raw or other sugar
1½ teaspoons sea salt
¼ cup roasted peanuts, finely chopped or crushed
3 scallions, white and light green parts only, chopped fine

1. In a medium saucepan over medium heat bring broth to a boil.
2. Add pumpkin and galangal (in cheesecloth to remove quickly and easily; see note below) and simmer over medium heat for 25 minutes or until the pumpkin is soft (fresher pumpkins will cook faster).
3. Turn heat down and add coconut milk, soy sauce, raw sugar, and salt and stir until combined and sugar is dissolved. Turn the heat off and let cool; remove the galangal.
4. Puree for babies and freeze leftovers. For adults and older babies, serve with finely chopped roasted peanuts and scallions sprinkled on top.

Notes: Galangal is a mild type of ginger. It has a floral aroma and is a bit tougher to cut than ginger. Try going to an Asian market to find it. Some people recommend substituting ginger, but ginger at the same quantities is too pungent. You can make the soup using ginger sparingly or make the soup without it. Using butternut squash will make the soup sweeter than using pumpkin.

Wrapping spices and herbs in cheesecloth is a great way to give flavor to soups and a pot of beans and is easy to remove when the cooking is finished. Another great trick is to put them in a refillable tea bag. Try it here with the galangal, which is a bit too fibrous to puree with the soup and is better removed after cooking.



lemongrass chicken curry

{ B. T. NGUYEN }

SERVES 4

Curry is a traditional Vietnamese comfort food. This is not an actual curry; it is more like a stew. The dish can be pureed and thinned with broth or breast milk if necessary or pureed with plain cooked rice or potatoes. When cooking, the chili powder should be put in toward the end of cooking, after the baby's portion is removed. I like prepping everything the night before so it is ready. Chef B. T. Nguyen recommends serving the curry soupy with freshly baked French bread. I often entice Cody to taste things by first dipping in some bread.

Marinade:

¼ lemongrass stalk, tough outer leaves removed and stalk chopped
1 shallot, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
1 teaspoon chopped galangal or ginger (use less for infants) (see note on page 24)
1½ teaspoons chopped fresh cilantro
2 tablespoons coconut milk
1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil
2 green onions, white parts only, sliced (reserve green parts for curry)
1 tablespoon lime juice

Curry:

2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cubed
¼ cup vegetable oil, divided
1 pound potatoes (or batata), peeled and evenly chopped
½ onion, chopped small
2 medium carrots, peeled and evenly chopped
½ cup chicken stock or coconut water
7 ounces coconut milk (about half a can)
¾ stalk lemongrass, tough outer leaves removed and stalk pounded to crush and soften
1 teaspoon best-quality fish sauce
1 teaspoon palm sugar or golden granulated sugar
Salt and pepper
½ teaspoon chili powder (eschew for infants, adjust for children)
Small bunch cilantro
Small bunch basil
2 green onions, green parts only, sliced

For the Marinade:

Grind the lemongrass in a spice or coffee grinder. Add the rest of the marinade ingredients and process until smooth. Rub onto the chicken cubes, massaging a bit to coat evenly. Marinate covered and refrigerated overnight or at least 3 hours. Remove from the refrigerator an hour before cooking.

For the Curry:

1. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in heavy-bottomed pan over medium heat. Add potatoes, onion, and carrots and cook, stirring occasionally, until evenly browned, about 5 minutes. Transfer browned vegetables to a plate.
2. In the same pan heat the remaining 2 tablespoons oil and add marinated chicken. Cook to brown for 5 minutes, turning occasionally to brown on all sides.
3. Add stock or coconut water, coconut milk, and crushed lemongrass stalks and return the potatoes and carrots back to the pan. Mix well and bring to boil.
4. Add fish sauce, sugar, salt and pepper, and chili powder (if using); simmer on low heat for 35 to 40 minutes, or until potatoes are soft.
5. Portion onto plates and sprinkle cilantro leaves, chopped basil, and green onion on top to serve.

Note: Lemongrass stalks have a lovely elusive flavor but are fibrous and can be hard to prepare correctly, especially for young children. It works best to cut the yellow section of stalk into thin slices and grind them in a mini grinder/chopper or food processor that handles small quantities, adding a bit of water or oil if necessary. For very small amounts pound them into a paste with a mortar and pestle.

whole grain sesame scallion pancakes with tofu

{ DIANE FORLEY }

SERVES 4 AS A SNACK OR PART OF LUNCH

I sometimes make these as part of Cody's packed lunch, and sometimes we make them together and shape them like dinosaurs with a cookie cutter. Cody doesn't always like the texture of the soft tofu in the pancakes, even if I chop the tofu small, so we occasionally add chicken or fresh soybeans, called edamame. These can be made with leftover plain grains or leftover rice from a flavored rice dish—omit the soy sauce or make the grains fresh.

- 2 eggs
- 2 cups cooked grains: rice, barley, or quinoa
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce (if using plain grains)
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon sliced scallions, white and light green part only (optional)
- ½ cup flour
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 cup cubed tofu
- 3 tablespoons olive oil

1. In a bowl, beat eggs with a fork.
2. Add grains, soy sauce if using, sesame oil, scallions if using, flour, salt, and pepper. Gently mix in tofu.
3. Heat olive oil in an 8-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat. Scoop small portions, flatten into pancakes, and place in the pan. Cook until brown on one side, about 5 minutes. Flip carefully with a spatula and finish browning over low heat until cooked through. The pancakes can also be baked in oiled muffin tins in a 375°F oven for 20 minutes.

