

Crispy sage topping

- Canola oil
- 12 fresh sage leaves
- Kosher salt or flaky sea salt

Bake the squash: Place a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. For easy clean up, line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. With a sharp, sturdy chef's knife, carefully cut the squash in half from stem to base. Scoop out and discard the stringy core and seeds. Arrange the halves cut-sides up on the prepared baking sheet. Brush each half with 1 teaspoon olive oil and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon salt. Place in the oven and bake for 40 to 50 minutes, until the edges begin to wrinkle and the flesh is fork-tender. Set aside to cool, then scoop out and reserve the flesh.

In a large Dutch oven or similar sturdy soup pot, heat the butter and remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium. Once the butter has melted, add the carrots, shallot, remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt, and black pepper. Cook until the shallot is beginning to caramelize, about 8 minutes.

Pour 1/2 cup of the stock into the pan and stir to remove any brown bits that have stuck to the bottom of the pan (this is flavor!). Reduce the heat to medium-low and add in the reserved squash, garlic, and honey. Cook for 30 seconds, until the garlic is fragrant, and then stir in the remaining stock. Add the thyme bundle and bay leaf. Increase the heat and bring the soup to a simmer. Let simmer gently for 15 minutes, adjusting the heat as needed and stirring periodically.

Remove the thyme and bay leaf. With an immersion blender, puree the soup until smooth (or you can transfer to a regular blender in batches and puree it that way; be careful as hot soup will splatter; return the soup to the pot). Stir in the sage, nutmeg, and Parmesan. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired. Serve hot with a sprinkle of additional Parmesan and crispy sage leaves (if using).

For the Crispy Sage (optional but great for a special occasion): In a small skillet, heat 1/8 inch of canola oil over medium high. When the oil is very hot, add the sage and cook for 30 to 45 seconds, turning the leaves to crisp them on both sides (be careful not to burn yourself). When the bubbling subsides, the leaves should be crisp. Carefully drain the sage onto a paper towel-lined plate. Immediately sprinkle it with salt.