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Tomato and Roasted Pepper Bisque

Serves 4 - 6

This is a lovely soup to prepare when you want a heart-healthy meal with just a touch of indulgence. Chopped and roasted red peppers are our favorite quick method for achieving that sweet, roasted red pepper flavor without the hassle of peeling pepper skins. An immersion blender will quickly become your best friend when making this smooth and satisfying bisque. Plus, you'll find that this soup gets even better a day or two later!

Bisque Ingredients:

4 red bell peppers, chopped
6 cloves garlic, peeled
4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
1/2 teaspoon Kosher salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 onion, minced
1 carrot, diced
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 tablespoon tomato paste
4 cups vegetable broth

1 can (28 oz) whole tomatoes
2 bay leaves
2 springs fresh thyme
1/4 cup half n' half

Pesto Ingredients:

4 cups basil leaves, packed
1 teaspoon Kosher salt
1/4 cup pine nuts
2 cloves garlic
3/4 cup olive oil
1 cup freshly grated Parmesan

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. On a large rimmed baking sheet, spread out the chopped red peppers and garlic in a single layer. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons olive oil, sprinkle with salt and black pepper and roast until peppers are a bit charred, about 45 minutes. Stir halfway through. Remove from the oven and set aside.
3. Make the pesto by combining all the pesto ingredients in a food processor and blending until smooth. Add additional olive oil or a drizzle of water as needed to thin. Set aside.
4. Meanwhile, in a large soup pot, over medium heat, sauté the onion and carrot in the remaining olive oil and butter until translucent. Add the tomato paste and cook for an additional minute. Add the vegetable broth, tomatoes, bay leaves, and fresh thyme. Simmer for 20 minutes.
5. Use tongs to remove the bay leaves. Add the roasted red pepper and garlic pieces, and remove the pot from the heat. Carefully blend the hot soup using an immersion blender until the texture is smooth.
6. Return the pureed soup to the heat, and stir in the half n' half. Drizzle the top with pesto, and sprinkle with additional salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot with crusty bread and butter.