



Sweet Corn Soup

SERVES 8

One of the most extraordinary sights in Peru is the dramatic landscape of the Incan ruins of Machu Picchu. I first saw it on a drizzly morning when the clouds filtered most of the breathtaking views. After a few hours, they withdrew like a curtain to reveal lush fields and granite terraces. I ended that long and meaningful day at the Sanctuary Lodge bar, where I enjoyed a pisco tasting lesson. After I sampled thirteen varieties of the Peruvian spirit, the chef brought out a steaming bowl of sweet corn soup. And as I gulped it down, he explained how Peru's 50 native corns were staple ingredients in the ancient Incan menu. In my kitchen, I kick up the corn soup with green chiles and a drizzle of sweet red pepper puree. And like my first sip on the mountain, it goes well with a generous swallow of Peruvian pisco.

INGREDIENTS

4 ears fresh corn on the cob, shucked
Kosher salt and black pepper
1 tablespoon vegetable oil 1 cup diced yellow onion
2 stalks celery, chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 baking potatoes
1/2 cup diced roasted green chile (see page 220)
2 baking potatoes (1 pound), peeled and diced
Red Pepper Sauce (recipe follows)

PROCESS:

Holding the ears upright on a board, cut the corn kernels from the cobs with a large knife; transfer the kernels to a bowl and set aside. Place the cobs in a deep pan and cover with 8 cups water. Add 2 teaspoons salt and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat, bring to a low simmer, and simmer for 1 hour. Remove the pan from the heat and remove the cobs and discard. Set the corn broth aside.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the onion and celery and cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the garlic and 2 teaspoons salt and cook for 1 minute more. Stir in the potatoes, green chiles, 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper. Add 5 cups of the corn broth, bring to a simmer, and cook for about 30 minutes, or until the potatoes are tender.

Pour the mixture into the bowl of a blender. Place a towel on the lid and blend until smooth. (You may have to do this in two batches.) Transfer the soup to a clean pot and keep warm until ready to serve. Taste to see if more salt is needed. If soup is too thick, add more corn broth.. Ladle soup into bowls and top with a drizzle of red pepper sauce and the reserved corn kernels.



Red Pepper Sauce

makes 2/3 cup

1 red bell pepper

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil

1 garlic clove, minced

1/2 teaspoon fresh thyme, or 1/4 teaspoon dried

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Place pepper on a baking sheet and roast for 35 to 40 minutes, until the skin is blistered. Let cool slightly, then remove the skin, seeds, and stem and discard. Transfer the flesh of the pepper to the bowl of a food processor. Add the olive oil, garlic, thyme, and salt and process until smooth. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator up to 3 days.