

CHEDDAR AND ALE SOUP

4 thick-cut bacon slices, cut into small strips
2 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 large yellow onion, diced
2 carrots, peeled and diced
2 celery stalks, diced
3 garlic cloves, minced
1/3 cup all-purpose flour
1 pale ale of choice
1 Tbs. Worcestershire sauce
2 cups milk
2 cups chicken broth
1 1/4 lb. sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
Toasted croutons for garnish

In a soup pot over medium-high heat, cook the bacon until crisp, about 8 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain.

Discard all but 2 Tbs. of the fat in the pot. Reduce the heat to medium and melt the butter. Add the onion, carrots and celery, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are softened, about 10-15 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute. Add the flour and cook, stirring occasionally, for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the ale and cook, stirring constantly, for 2 to 3 minutes. It will be bubbly. Add the Worcestershire, milk and broth, increase the heat to medium-high and bring to a simmer. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for 10 to 12 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat and puree the soup with an immersion blender until smooth.

Set the pot over medium-low heat and add the cheese by the handful, stirring constantly; do not allow the soup to boil. Season with salt and pepper. Ladle the soup into bowls. Garnish with croutons and the bacon and drizzle with extra virgin olive oil or parsley oil. Serve immediately. Serves 6-8.

Parsley Oil: take a handful of parsley, rough chopped, puree it in blender or immersion blender and then strain through a fine mesh sieve.

Toasted Croutons: cube or tear a loaf of fresh artisanal bread, place it on a sheet pan, drizzle generously with olive oil, garlic powder, salt and pepper. Bake until crisp at 350 degrees, for 10-15 minutes, depending on the size of your cubes.