

## **Butternut Squash Soup with Pancetta and Sage**

*makes 2 quarts*

- 3 ounces thinly sliced pancetta
- 1 large yellow onion, peeled and small diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 1/2 to 3 pounds butternut squash (1 large) peeled, seeded, and cut into 3/4 inch chunks
- 1 quart (32 ounces) homemade or low sodium chicken stock
- 1 cup apple cider
- 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (depending on heat preference)
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1/4 cup fresh sage leaves, minced and divided
- kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

In a large, heavy-bottomed pot, cook pancetta over medium heat until golden, 6-8 minutes. Remove from pan and place on a paper towel lined plate. Crumble when cooled.

Remove all but two tablespoons fat from pot. Add diced onions and cook over medium heat until soft and translucent but not brown, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and stir until fragrant, 1 minute.

Add squash, chicken stock, apple cider, crushed red pepper flakes, cinnamon stick, 3 tablespoons sage leaves, 2 teaspoons salt, and 1 teaspoon black pepper. Stir and bring to a boil. Reduce to a simmer and cook, partially covered and stirring occasionally, until squash is very tender, about 30-35 minutes.

Discard cinnamon stick. Remove pot from heat and purée soup until smooth with an immersion blender. Alternatively, working in batches, purée in blender until smooth (using great caution when blending hot liquids). Warm the soup in pot until it reaches serving temperature and test for seasoning, adding more salt, pepper and crushed red pepper flakes if needed. If soup becomes too thick, add a little stock or water to thin it.

Serve in bowls or cups and garnish with pancetta crumbles and remaining tablespoon of minced sage.