

Butternut and Tomato Pâté

3 cups diced and peeled butternut squash
3 cloves garlic, peeled but left whole
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup neutral flavored oil
2 cups roughly chopped tomatoes
1 cup crème fraîche, mascarpone, or cream cheese (in that order of preference)
1 stick softened butter (this will seem like a lot of butter. That's because it is. Use it all.)
White pepper, nutmeg, and salt to taste
Toasted crusty bread



You might think that, given how long I've been cooking, my training in cooking, and the sheer amount of cooking I do (95% of the food my fiancé and I eat is made by me), that I'm totally confident in all things food and capable of making the most high-end cuisine whenever I want. This is simply not the case. I have never worked in a place with a Michelin star. I have not worked in a place with a sommelier and a captain and a team of servers for every table. My professional career isn't even that long, just 5 years in professional kitchens and production facilities. So, the Imposter Syndrome can get really bad. I start to think that maybe I'm not actually that good, that I don't deserve the title of "Cook", and it tends to spiral pretty hard.

And then I make something like this, and I think "Yeah, I still got it." This pâté is rich and decadent and feels like something that could be on the seasonal charcuterie board of any restaurant with a giant staff and dozens of accolades. It looks good enough to be in food magazines, and, with a more talented food photographer and stylist than I am, trending on Instagram in 13 minutes flat. In short, I love this. And I really needed it.

Heat the oil in a large pan over medium heat. Once warm, add the squash and garlic cloves. Allow to cook gently, without stirring, until the bottom begins to brown, and the squash is getting soft, about 15 minutes. Gently stir the squash to try and flip the pieces over and add the tomato.

Raise the temperature to medium-high. Cook, stirring occasionally (and very gently) until the tomato has reduced, the squash is totally cooked, the vegetables have browned a little, and the oil has turned a burnished orangey-red. This will take about another 20 minutes. It seems like a while for what's really a snack, but if you're doing other chores in the kitchen, you can really just let the pan do its thing.

Allow the veggies to cool slightly. Then, blend all the veggies, the oil in the pan, the crème fraîche (or mascarpone or cream cheese if you can't find crème fraîche), the butter, and generous cracks of white pepper, grating of nutmeg and pinches of salt until very, VERY smooth. Taste and adjust for seasoning.

Pour mix into a container pretty enough to serve from and allow to chill. The pâté will firm up as it cools and become amazingly thick and decadent.

Toast several slices of bread. Optionally, rub the toasted bread with a raw clove of garlic as it comes out of the toaster. Let bread cool slightly and spread the toast with a generous amount of the pâté.

Garnish with parsley, basil, another herb, or nothing at all. Devour. Be happy.

Bonus recipes:

This could easily become a soup by cutting the butter in half and adding a few cups of good chicken stock. Blend and serve warm.

It could also be a wonderful pasta filling if you're making homemade ravioli. In that case, swap the butter for 1 large egg.