

ROASTED RED PEPPER AND TOMATO SOUP

SERVES 4

Roasting and peeling the peppers is a bit of a faff, but it's worth it. The other option is not to peel them, but to sieve the soup at the end – it makes it much quicker, and the sieving is easy (see note).

INGREDIENTS

1	tbsp olive oil plus extra for rubbing on peppers	18	tsp sugar
1	chopped onion	6	cups vegetable stock (preferably Swiss Marigold stock)
0.5	half a head garlic		salt and pepper
3	red peppers	1	pinch cayenne
4	large tomatoes, peeled and seeded	2	tbsp butter
4	sprigs thyme	6	tbsp crème fraiche
2	tsp paprika		

INSTRUCTIONS

Rub the whole peppers with olive oil, and place them under a very hot grill (or, if you have done this before, you can also place them directly onto a gas flame on the hob – but it can get messy if the pepper bursts). Turn the peppers so that they become blackened all over. Remove from the grill and put into a heat proof bowl and cover with cling film. The peppers will sweat and when they are cool the skin should be easy to remove. Whilst they are cooling, rub the garlic (in one piece) with some olive oil and roast in the oven at 200° for about 20 minutes until it is just soft. When the peppers are cool, peel off the skin and, preserving as much of the juice as possible, chop the peppers and remove the core and the seeds.

The alternative (quicker) method is to slice the **raw** peppers, removing the core and seeds, rub with olive oil and place in a roasting tin in the oven at about 225° until they start to char at the edges. The garlic can go in with the peppers.

When you remove the peppers, leave the garlic to cool slightly, and then squeeze out the roasted garlic from the cloves ready to add to the soup.

Heat oil until warm but not hot. Add onion and garlic and cook slowly until soft but not coloured. Stir in chopped tomato, peppers, thyme, paprika and sugar. Cook over low heat until all the tomato juices have evaporated (about 25 minutes). Add the stock, salt and pepper, and cayenne. Bring to boil, then simmer partly covered for a further 30 minutes.

Puree soup (see note re sieving), add butter and bring to a simmer.

Place in bowls and add 1 tbsp of the crème fraiche to each.

NOTE: If you decide not to peel your peppers, but to sieve your soup, use a fine sieve over a bowl, and pour soup into the sieve after it has been pureed. Then use the back of a soup ladle to push the soup through the sieve, and twist it around a bit to extract all the flavor. It's very quick!

If you have never peeled tomatoes before – the easiest way is just to boil a pan of water and drop your tomatoes in for about a minute. Remove them and put them straight into cold water. Leave for a minute or so, and the peel will come straight off.