

# Spicy Gravenstein Chowder

*This soup makes a wonderful first course but is also substantial enough to be the main dish on a warm summer night; all you need is a big green salad alongside.*

## INGREDIENTS

- 3 to 4 bacon slices, regular or veggie (optional)
- 1 shallot, minced
- 5 large Gravenstein apples, peeled, cored, and diced
- 2 medium potatoes, peeled and diced (Bodega Reds if possible)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 3/4 teaspoon chipotle pepper
- 4 cups stock (see Cook's note below)
- 4 oz naturally-smoked cheddar or goat cheese, grated
- 6 tablespoons crème fraîche, stirred until smooth
- 2 tablespoons snipped chives or minced Italian parsley



## PREPARATION

- Fry bacon in a medium pot, such as a Dutch oven, until it's fully crisp (or prepare veggie bacon per package instructions). Transfer bacon to absorbent paper and pour off all but about 3 tablespoons of bacon fat (or substitute 3 tablespoons of butter in the pot).
- Return pot to medium-low heat, add the shallot, and cook until soft and fragrant, about 6-7 minutes; do not let it brown. Add apples and potatoes and sauté for 4-5 minutes, until just beginning to soften and color. Season generously with salt and pepper, and add chipotle powder.
- Pour in the stock, increase heat to high, and when the stock boils, reduce heat so the mixture simmers gently. Cook until the apples and potatoes are completely tender, about 15-20 minutes. Remove from heat, let cool slightly and puree with an immersion blender. If you don't have an immersion blender, pass the soup through a food mill fitted with the small blade.
- Return the soup to very low heat. If it's too thick, thin with a little water until desired consistency is reached and heat through. Add cheese and stir until incorporated into the soup. Taste and correct for salt and pepper.
- Chop or crumble the bacon, if using.
- To serve, ladle into soup plates and top each portion with a spoonful of crème fraîche. Sprinkle on chives or parsley, followed by crumbled bacon. Serve immediately.

Cook's note: Make smoked stock using the carcass of a smoked chicken or duck or by simmering a smoked ham bone or smoked ham hocks in chicken stock. If you don't feel like going to the trouble, you can use regular chicken stock, although the soup will lack the full depth of flavor it has with smoked stock. Vegetarians may substitute mushroom stock or veggie stock instead of poultry or meat stock.

Serves 4 to 6.

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