

Golden Pepper and Yellow Tomato Soup | SERVES 4

This September soup is flushed with the colors of early fall. In addition to their attractive appearance, the yellow-gold hues signify more sweetness in the peppers and less acidity in the tomatoes, making a soup with a softer flavor than if it were made with the green peppers and red tomatoes bought, perhaps, a few weeks earlier. If you have thick, meaty peppers and the time to grill them first, they'll make the soup slightly smoky and silky textured. Otherwise, just chop them with the skins on. Smoked Spanish paprika (*pimentón de la Vera*) will also give the soup a hint of smoke.

1 pound yellow or orange tomatoes
⅓ cup white rice
sea salt and freshly ground pepper
1 onion
2 garlic cloves
3 yellow or orange bell peppers
2 tablespoons olive oil
pinch saffron threads
1 bay leaf
2 thyme sprigs, leaves plucked from the stems
1 teaspoon sweet paprika or ½ teaspoon smoked Spanish paprika
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 quart Vegetable Stock, page 385, chicken stock, or water
slivered opal basil or chopped marjoram and parsley for garnish

1. Bring 2 quarts water to a boil. Slice an X at the base of each tomato. Plunge them, 2 at a time, into the water for about 10 seconds, then remove and set aside. Add the rice and ½ teaspoon salt to the water, lower the heat to simmer, and cook until the rice is tender, about 12 minutes. Drain.
2. Chop the onion. Mince the garlic with a pinch of salt until mushy. Dice the peppers into small squares, removing the seeds and membranes first. You should have about 2 cups. Peel and seed the tomatoes, reserving the juice, then dice the walls and mince the cores.
3. Warm the oil in a soup pot and add the onions, peppers, saffron, bay leaf, thyme, and paprika. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until the onion has begun to soften and color, about 6 minutes. Add the garlic, then stir in the tomato paste and 1 teaspoon salt. Give it a stir and add ¼ cup water. Stew for 5 minutes, then add the tomatoes, their juice, and the stock. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer, covered, for 25 minutes.
4. When ready to serve, reheat the soup with the rice, then ladle it into bowls. Or make a mound of rice in each bowl and spoon the soup around it. Season with pepper and garnish with fine slivers of opal basil leaves or marjoram chopped with a few parsley leaves.