

## Slow Cooker Bacon, Cheddar, and Cauliflower Soup

4 strips bacon, chopped  
½ medium yellow onion  
3 garlic cloves, minced  
2 medium heads cauliflower, cut into florets  
5 cups chicken stock (or veggie stock)  
1 bay leaf  
½ tsp. dried thyme  
Pinch red chile flakes  
1 tsp. Kosher salt  
1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper  
½ cup half-and-half  
2 cups shredded cheddar cheese  
Green onion, chopped (for garnish)

In a large Dutch oven (or slow cooker with a sauté setting), brown the bacon pieces over medium-high heat until crisp (about 8 minutes). Remove with a slotted spoon, drain on paper towels, and reserve for later in the fridge. Sauté the onion in the bacon grease until translucent (about 8 minutes), stirring occasionally. Add the garlic; sauté about 30 seconds or until fragrant. Add in the cauliflower florets, stir to combine, and sauté until the cauliflower starts to brown (about 10 minutes).

If you're using a slow cooker, pour in the stock, bay leaf, thyme, chile flakes, salt, and pepper. Stir to combine. Cook on low for 6 hours or high for 4. Once the cauliflower is softened, turn the heat setting to warm. Add in the half-and-half and cheese, stir until melted. Then, either use a potato masher to mash the cauliflower to your desired consistency or blend with an immersion blender.

If you're using a Dutch oven, now is the time to either transfer to the slow cooker or continue cooking on the stove.

To transfer to slow cooker: Pour in the stock, bay leaf, thyme, chile flakes, salt, and pepper. Stir to combine. Add in the cauliflower mixture carefully, stirring to combine. Cook on low for 6 hours. Once the cauliflower is softened, turn the heat setting to warm. Add in the half-and-half and cheese, stir until melted. Then, either use a potato masher to mash the cauliflower to your desired consistency or blend with an immersion blender.

To cook on the stovetop: Pour in the stock, bay leaf, thyme, chile flakes, salt, and pepper. Stir to combine. Cover and simmer on medium-low heat for about an hour, until cauliflower is softened. Then, turn off the heat and add in the half-and-half and cheese, stir until melted. Then, either use a potato masher to mash the cauliflower to your desired consistency or blend with an immersion blender.

Garnish with reserved bacon bits and green onion.

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