

**Seasonal Eating**  
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**Cauliflower Warms Up Winter**  
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Cauliflower is one of those under-utilized, under-appreciated, misunderstood vegetables. We serve it raw on a vegetable platter or boil it and serve with cheese sauce. But this cool-season cole crop has so much more potential!

When I was growing up we almost never had cauliflower – we had its cousin broccoli or asparagus or green beans. But lately I’ve been experimenting more with this vegetable and have grown to enjoy its versatility and flavor. One of my favorite ways to eat cauliflower is roasted. I break it into florets, place on a parchment lined baking sheet, toss with a little olive oil and salt and roast at 400 for about 30 minutes or until tender to a fork and lightly browned. In one of the sheet pan dinners from last month, I served it with a pork chop and sweet potatoes to raves of “this is the best thing you ever made” from my male co-workers. For that one I added a little garlic and parmesan cheese to the oil and salt before roasting. A couple of years ago, cauliflower steaks were all the rage by cutting the whole head vertically into slices that were then laid flat and roasted. They were drizzled with vinaigrettes or topped with roasted tomatoes for a vegetarian main dish or a carnivore side.



Then it was on to re-inventing the classic cauliflower and cheese sauce. The answer – soup! With its white color, the soup looks a little bland but believe me it’s not. This is one bowl full of comfort and warmth for a dreary winter day. I took inspiration from loaded potato soup with the flavors of bacon, green onions and cheese. Like potatoes, cauliflower can take on the flavor of what you put with it and this is a winner. Start with crispy fried bacon and then sauté onions, celery and carrots for a flavorful base. Then in goes the cauliflower and chicken broth to cook until tender. So how does it get so creamy and thick? With a little trick from the Pioneer Woman’s cauliflower soup – a cheese sauce – yes here we go with that classic combo of cheese and cauliflower! A basic roux of butter and flour with added milk and Cheddar cheese cooked into a luxurious, creamy, thick sauce. Stir it into the cauliflower mixture and wow! Creamy, cheesy, bacony all in one bowl. So take advantage of the dreary days of winter and make a pot of cauliflower soup.

For more recipes and information about seasonal eating, visit the Bedford County Extension website ([bedford.tennessee.edu](http://bedford.tennessee.edu)).

**Cheesy Cauliflower Bacon Soup**

6 slices bacon, chopped  
1 small onion, chopped  
3 stalks celery, chopped  
15 baby carrots (or 2 regular), chopped  
Kosher salt

Black pepper  
1 teaspoon dried thyme  
1 small head cauliflower, cleaned and chopped  
3 cups chicken broth  
3 tablespoons butter  
3 tablespoons flour  
1 cup milk  
1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese  
4 green onions, sliced

In a large stockpot or Dutch oven, fry the bacon pieces until browned and crisp. Remove bacon to a paper towel, leaving the drippings in the pan. Add the onion, celery, carrots, a pinch of salt, a pinch of pepper and the thyme to the drippings and sauté until onions are translucent and vegetables are slightly softened. Add cauliflower and chicken broth. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, cover and cook until tender, about 30-45 minutes. Meanwhile, in a smaller saucepan, melt the butter. Whisk in the flour and cook for a minute. Add the milk and cook until thickened, whisking often. Add the cheese and stir until melted. When the cauliflower is tender, blend about 2/3 of the mixture in a blender or food processor until smooth, being careful as it is hot. Return blended mixture to the rest of the cauliflower and stir in the cheese sauce. Adjust seasonings with salt and pepper. Heat until hot through but do not boil. Spoon into bowls and top with cooked bacon and green onions.