

Fresh From the Kitchen

Recipes excerpted from ***Happy Holidays from the Diva of Do-Ahead*** by Diane Phillips.
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Mediterranean Artichoke Pesto Torte

This beautiful torte combines layers of garlicky artichoke pesto, roasted red pepper puree, and flavored goat cheese. Delicious on toasted baguette slices, cucumber slices, or crackers, it can be made several days ahead and refrigerated, or frozen for several weeks. You will find small tortes like this in the deli section of your grocery store for a small fortune. Instead of making this recipe in one large mold, you can layer the mixture into smaller ramekins to set out at different tables around the entertaining space. Any leftover pesto and puree is delicious tossed into pasta.

Goat Cheese Layer

Two 11-ounce packages goat cheese, softened
One 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
2 cloves garlic, minced

Artichoke Pesto

Two 4.5-ounce jars marinated artichokes hearts, drained
2 cloves garlic
1/4 cup packed fresh Italian parsley leaves
1/2 cup pine nuts
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 to 1/3 cup olive oil, as needed

Roasted Red Pepper Puree

Two 6-ounce jars roasted red peppers, drained
1/4 cup olive oil
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Marinated artichoke quarters or thin red bell pepper strips for garnish

1. Line a 4-cup decorative mold with plastic wrap so it extends over the sides by about 4 inches.
2. To make the goat cheese layer, with an electric mixer, beat the cheeses together in a large bowl until smooth. Add the minced garlic and blend until incorporated.
3. To make the pesto, in a food processor combine the artichoke hearts, garlic, parsley, pine nuts, and cheese, and pulse to break up the artichokes. Add 1/4 cup of the oil and pulse 3 to 4 more times. Add more oil if necessary to get a pesto-like consistency, though you still want chunks of artichoke. Transfer the pesto to a small bowl and wipe the inside of the food processor clean.

Mediterranean Artichoke Pesto Torte, (continued)

4. To make the puree, combine the red peppers, oil, and vinegar in the food processor and pulse 4 to 5 times, until almost smooth; there should still be red pepper bits in the mixture. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

5. Wet your hands with cold water and spread a 1/2-inch layer of the cheese mixture over the bottom of the mold. Top the cheese with a 1/2-inch layer of the artichoke pesto, then another layer of cheese, and then a 1/2-inch layer of the red pepper puree. Continue to layer in sequence, ending with the cheese. Bring the ends of the plastic wrap over the mold. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour to firm up the torte.

Diva Do-Ahead: At this point you can refrigerate for up to 3 days or freeze for up to 6 weeks. Defrost in the refrigerator overnight before continuing. Freeze any remaining pesto or red pepper puree for future use.

6. When ready to serve, unmold the torte onto a serving platter; removing the plastic wrap, and garnish with the marinated artichoke hearts or red bell pepper strips or both. Serve cold or at room temperature.