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Herb & Cheese Focaccia with Olive Butter Tapenade

Serves 4-6 for appetizers

It's hard to top the delightful flavors of fresh, warm focaccia! Understated and simple, it's usually topped with nothing more than fresh herbs, coarse sea salt, and a liberal dose of olive oil. We've taken focaccia a step further by adding a thin layer of taleggio cheese in the center, for an extra savory, meltingly good taste. Then, we've paired it with a buttery, olive tapenade that takes this traditional appetizer into the next dimension of deliciousness.

Herb & Cheese Focaccia

Ingredients:

1-1/2 cups warm water
1 package active, dry yeast
3-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1-1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
2/3 cup extra virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
5 oz. taleggio cheese
1 teaspoon flaked sea salt
2 spring free rosemary
2-3 leaves fresh sage
1 teaspoon flaked truffle salt

Directions:

1. Warm the water to 110°F and add the yeast. Stir and let the yeasted water set for about 3-5 minutes, or until foamy.
2. In a stand mixer with a dough hook, place the flour and kosher salt and mix on a low speed to combine. Gradually add 1/3 cup of oil and the yeasted water until all the ingredients are incorporated and a dough ball forms.
3. Transfer the dough to a floured surface and knead a few more times until the dough is soft and smooth, but not sticky.
4. Coat the bottom of a large bowl with additional olive oil; place the dough ball and turn to coat. Cover the bowl with a kitchen towel and let the dough set for approximately one hour, or until doubled in size.
5. Once the dough has doubled in size, separate it into two equal pieces. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Tip: Dough may be refrigerated after rising for up to 3 days before baking. Bring it to room temperature before using.
6. Cut the taleggio cheese into 1/2" cubes, Chop the sage, and remove the rosemary leaves from the woody stem.

Continued on Page 2



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Page 2, continued

7. Coat a baking stone with the remaining 1/3 cup of olive oil. Press one ball of dough directly on the coated surface, stretch to approximately 8" x 11." Leave a 2" margin of stone. Distribute the cheese cubes evenly over the surface of the dough.

8. On a floured surface press out the second ball of dough until it becomes the same size as the first and place the second sheet of dough on top of the cheese, pressing down to ensure it is covered. Press your fingertips into the surface of the dough to create deep holes, pressing all the way to the baking stone. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle on the rosemary, sage, flaked salt, and truffle salt. Tip: Don't skimp on the olive oil! Let it sink into the wells you've created.

9. Bake in a preheated 400°F oven for 20 minutes or until the top begins to turn golden. Sprinkle on additional flaked salt if desired.

Olive Butter Tapenade

Ingredients:

1/4 cup unsalted butter
4 oil-packed, sun-dried tomatoes
12 Kalamata olives, pitted
4 Cerignola olives, pitted
1 clove garlic, finely minced
1 teaspoon drained capers
1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper

Directions:

Bring the butter to room temperature. Finely chop the olive, garlic, sun-dried tomatoes, and capers. Mix all ingredients together in a bowl until combined.