

## Holiday Appetizers



### Almond Crusted Chevre and Grape "Truffles"

- 4 oz chevre (fresh goat cheese), crumbled
- 2 oz cream cheese, softened
- 2 tbsp port wine
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 20-24 green grapes
- ½ cup whole almonds, toasted and finely chopped
- ½ cup shelled and finely chopped pistachios
- ¼ cup chives, finely chopped
- ½ cup finely chopped parsley

In a bowl, mix together chevre and cream cheese with a fork. Add port wine and a pinch of salt and pepper; mix until smooth. Chill 30 minutes. Scoop 1 tbsp cheese mixture.

Press grape into mixture. Using plastic wrap, cover grape with cheese and roll into a little ball with grape inside. Remove plastic wrap. Continue making rest of truffles.

Toast almonds on the stovetop in a dry sauté pan until light brown in color. Lay out on a large cutting board to cool. Using a large knife, finely chop almonds. (Alternatively, for ground almonds or pistachios use a food processor.)

Spread almonds onto plate. Finely chop chives and combine with almonds. Roll each truffle ball in almonds and coat evenly.

Spread pistachios onto another plate. Finely chop parsley and combine with pistachios. Roll each truffle ball in almonds and coat evenly. Refrigerate, covered until serving. Makes 2 Dozen

**NOTE:** Sometimes I use small thin Pretzel Stix as picks



### Hot Spinach Dip

This rich, creamy dip can be assembled through step two up to three days ahead, then covered and refrigerated; it can also be served as a side dish. Two 10-ounce packages of frozen spinach can be substituted for the fresh. Thaw according to box instructions, drain well, and chop.

2 teaspoons olive oil, plus more for baking dish  
1 medium onion, diced  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
2 pounds spinach, cleaned, trimmed, and coarsely chopped  
1/2 cup milk  
6 ounces reduced-fat bar cream cheese  
3 dashes Worcestershire sauce  
3 dashes hot sauce, such as Tabasco  
3/4 cup shredded mozzarella  
Coarse salt and ground pepper  
Baguette slices, breadsticks, or crackers, for serving

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. In a Dutch oven or large pot, heat oil over medium. Add onion and garlic; cook until lightly browned, 5 to 8 minutes. Add spinach in two additions, letting the first batch wilt before adding the next; cook until completely wilted, 5 to 8 minutes. Transfer to a colander; drain, pressing to release all excess liquid.

In the same pot, warm milk over high heat. Whisk in cream cheese until melted, about 3 minutes. Add spinach, Worcestershire sauce, hot sauce, and 1/4 cup mozzarella; stir to combine. Season with salt and pepper. Pour into a lightly oiled 1 1/2-quart shallow baking dish; sprinkle with remaining 1/2 cup mozzarella. Bake until bubbly and golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes. Serve hot with accompaniments, as desired. **Yield** Makes 3 cups



### **Cheese Puffs**

2/3 cup water  
3 tablespoon unsalted butter  
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt  
3/4 cup all-purpose flour  
3 large eggs  
1/2 cup finely grated Comte or Gruyere cheese  
2 tablespoons Dijon-style mustard  
1/8 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg  
Pinch of Cayenne

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or brush it with butter and dust with flour. In a medium saucepan, bring the water, butter, and the salt to a boil. When the butter is melted,

remove the pan from the heat and sift in the flour. With a wooden spoon, stir the flour and liquid together to make a paste.

Return the pan to the heat, and stir the paste to dry it out; in about 2 minutes, it will form a smooth, shiny ball that pulls away from the sides of the pan. Transfer the paste to a mixing bowl; stir with a wooden spoon for 1 minute to cool the paste.

Whisk one egg in a small bowl and reserve 1 tablespoon of the whisked egg to use as a glaze for the puffs. Add the remainder of the whisked egg plus the other 2 eggs, one at a time, to the paste, making sure each egg is fully incorporated in the dough before adding the next egg.

When doing this by hand, the egg may at first seem to resist mixing with the dough, but stay with it and the egg will bind with the paste to make a stiff dough.

Once all the eggs are incorporated, mix in the cheese, mustard, nutmeg, and cayenne.

With a pastry bag or 2 spoons, form the dough into plump 1-inch rounds, spaced 1 1/2 inches apart on the prepared baking sheet. If using spoons, dip them in warm water after forming each round so the dough doesn't stick to the spoons.

If you are using a pastry bag, gently squeeze the bag to form the rounds; release the pressure before you lift the bag to avoid lopsided tails.

Lightly brush the rounds with the reserved egg. Bake the cheese puffs for 20 minutes until they are puffed and golden brown. For crisp, light puffs, do not open the oven door while they are cooking.

Serve warm. The gougeres can be made a day ahead and frozen for future use, then reheated in a 350 degrees F oven for 5 minutes. Makes about 30 small puffs.



### **Creamy Mushroom Toast**

12-20 mushrooms  
1 small yellow onion  
1 tbsp butter  
salt, black pepper  
4 oz cream (any fat content)  
grated cheese, preferably a rather sharp one I like Vermont white cheddar or aged swiss  
4 slices of artisan bread  
4 tbsp cream cheese

Fry the mushrooms, onion and butter until most of the liquid is gone, and the mushrooms are starting to brown. Add the cream and cook for a few minutes.

Season with salt and pepper. Spread the cream cheese onto the bread, and place in an ovenproof baking dish. Divide the mushroom sauce on top, and sprinkle generously with some cheese.

Bake at 350 degrees for 8-10 minutes, or until the cheese is golden and bubbling. Cut each slice into 4 triangles. Enough for four toasts.



### Lemon-Thyme Dip

Serve this simple, elegant dip with crudités such as carrots, fennel, endive, and broccoli.

- 1 cup reduced-fat sour cream
- 1/2 cup light mayonnaise
- Finely grated zest and juice of 1 lemon (about 1 tsp. zest and 2 to 3 tablespoons juice)
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme leaves, plus more for garnish.
- Coarse salt and ground pepper

In a small bowl, combine sour cream, mayonnaise, lemon zest and juice, and thyme; season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a serving dish and garnish with more thyme; serve with crudités, or cover and refrigerate, up to 3 days. Yield 1 1/2 cups



### Crispy Prosciutto Cups with Pear

3 ounces prosciutto, thinly sliced  
1 ripe Bartlett pear, finely diced  
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Cut prosciutto into 24 two-inch squares. Place one square (overlapping any tears) in each cup of a mini cupcake tin. Bake until fat turns golden, about 15 minutes. Using a fork, immediately transfer to a paper towel to drain; cool completely. In a small bowl, combine pear and juice. Place 1/2 teaspoon pear mixture in each cup just before serving.



### **Endive with Shrimp Salad**

8 ounces medium cooked shrimp, finely chopped  
3 ounces goat cheese, room temperature  
2 tablespoons chopped chives, plus more for garnish  
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice  
coarse salt and ground pepper  
20 endive leaves (from about 3 heads)

In a small bowl, combine shrimp, cheese, chives, and juice; season with salt and pepper. Cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate up to 1 day. To serve, place 1 tablespoon mixture on each endive leaf, and top with additional chives.