

COOK'S
ILLUSTRATED

all
time
best

appetizers





contents



- 000 welcome to america's test kitchen
- 000 introduction
- 000 getting started
- 000 wrapped and stuffed
- 000 snacks in bowls
- 000 sliced and stacked
- 000 spread and dipped
- 000 passed and plattered
- 000 conversions and equivalents
- 000 index



snacks in bowls



- 000 **crispy spiced chickpeas**
- 000 **marinated olives**
with feta
with baby mozzarella
- 000 **spiced nuts**
curry-spiced nuts
cinnamon-spiced nuts
- 000 **kale chips**
ranch-style kale chips
spicy sesame-ginger kale chips
- 000 **perfect popcorn**
garlic and herb popcorn
parmesan-pepper popcorn
cajun-spiced popcorn
hot and sweet popcorn
- 000 **bbq party mix**
fisherman's friend party mix
asian firecracker party mix
- 000 **cheddar cheese coins**
parmesan and rosemary cheese coins
gruyère, mustard, and caraway cheese coins
blue cheese and celery seed cheese coins
- 000 **homemade cheese straws**
- 000 **olive oil-sea salt pita chips**
rosemary-parmesan pita chips
chili-spiced pita chips
buttermilk-ranch pita chips
cinnamon-sugar pita chips
- 000 **kettle chips**



prosciutto-wrapped figs with gorgonzola

serves 8 to 10

why this recipe works Few food pairings are more perfect than savory, salty prosciutto and the sweetness of fresh figs. To add another level of sweet-salty complexity and textural interest to this appetizer, we also incorporated bold, pungent blue cheese and golden honey into the mix. We started by halving the figs to make them easier to eat. For the cheese, tasters preferred creamy, assertive Gorgonzola. Small mounds of the cheese, placed in the center of each fig before adding the honey, offered a rich, bold counterpoint to the figs' tender flesh and sweet flavor. Briefly microwaving the honey ensured that it was easy to drizzle over the cheese-stuffed figs. Then we wrapped the whole thing in thin slices of prosciutto. To guarantee the ham stayed put, we stuck a toothpick through the center of each fig. Be sure to choose ripe figs for this recipe. They not only taste best, but also yield easily when mounding the blue cheese gently into the centers.

2 ounces Gorgonzola cheese

16 fresh figs, stemmed and halved lengthwise

1 tablespoon honey

16 thin slices prosciutto (8 ounces), halved lengthwise

Mound 1 teaspoon Gorgonzola into center of each fig half. Microwave honey in bowl to loosen, about 10 seconds, then drizzle over cheese. Wrap prosciutto securely around figs, leaving fig ends uncovered. Secure prosciutto with toothpick and serve.

to make ahead

Wrapped figs can be refrigerated for up to 8 hours; bring to room temperature before serving.

notes from the test kitchen

buying prosciutto

Not too long ago, the only way to buy prosciutto was to find an Italian market and wait while someone sliced an imported ham by hand. But since domestic producers have gotten into the game, many supermarkets now carry this cured pork product in grab 'n' go packages. Look for a brand that's aged at least 12 months for complex flavor and sliced paper-thin to avoid chewiness. The ingredients list should include just pork and salt. Our winning brand is tender, buttery **Volpi Traditional Prosciutto**. Another advantage to presliced prosciutto is that the sealed packages can keep for several months, making them easy to keep on hand.

kettle chips

why this recipe works Whether thick cut, crinkle, plain, or flavored, potato chips are one of America's most beloved snack foods. Our favorites are small-batch, kettle-style chips, which cook up thicker and sturdier than regular potato chips with a distinctive caramelized flavor. Store-bought versions tend to be greasy and over-salted, but making a perfect batch at home is actually pretty simple. The first trick is getting the potatoes to the perfect thickness. Thicker chips never get properly crisp, while those that are too thin fry up as light as confetti. We found the sweet spot at 1/16 inch for thin but substantial, crisp chips. A mandoline made easy work of this potentially tedious task. Next, we tackled the frying step. Frying at too low a temperature made the chips soggy and greasy, but when we increased the heat, they burned. Realizing that the potatoes' starch was the source of our troubles, we finally landed on a method of rinsing, parboiling, and then frying. Rinsing washed away the exterior starch while parboiling jump-started the cooking and further reduced the amount of starch in the potatoes. It is a bit of work, but the reward of fresh, golden homemade potato chips was well worth it. You will need a mandoline for this recipe. These chips are best enjoyed the day they are made.

1 pound medium Yukon Gold potatoes, sliced 1/16 inch thick on mandoline

2 quarts vegetable oil

Fine sea salt

1. Line rimmed baking sheet with clean kitchen towel, and set wire rack in second rimmed baking sheet and line with triple layer of paper towels; set both aside. Place potato slices in large bowl and cover with cold water. Gently swirl potatoes to release starch. Drain potatoes and return to bowl. Repeat rinsing step until water no longer turns cloudy, about 5 rinses.

2. Bring 2 quarts water to boil in large saucepan over high heat. Add potatoes, return to gentle boil, and cook until just beginning to soften, 2 to 3 minutes. Drain potatoes well, then spread out over kitchen towel-lined sheet and thoroughly pat dry.

3. Meanwhile, heat oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat to 325 degrees. Carefully place one-quarter of potato slices in oil. Fry, stirring frequently with wire skimmer or slotted spoon, until oil stops bubbling and chips turn golden and crisp, 3 to 4 minutes. Adjust burner, if necessary, to maintain oil temperature around 325 degrees. As soon as chips finish frying (some chips may cook slightly faster than others), transfer to prepared wire rack using skimmer or slotted spoon. Season with salt to taste.

4. Return oil to 325 degrees and repeat with remaining potato slices in 3 more batches. Let cool to room temperature before serving.

serves 6 to 8

making kettle chips



1. Rinse thinly sliced potatoes in cold water until water runs clean.



2. Parboil potatoes until they just start to soften, 2 to 3 minutes.



3. Fry in batches. Remove chips when they turn golden brown and stop bubbling in oil.



fennel, olive, and goat cheese tarts

why this recipe works Savory tarts offer a more substantial addition to a party spread and can be the vehicle for a wide variety of flavor combinations. For this version, we used a fresh and sophisticated mixture of sautéed fennel and garlic along with briny olives and tangy goat cheese spiked with fresh basil and lemon. Our tart begins with convenient store-bought puff pastry which we parbaked. Once the pastry puffed up in the oven, we cut through some of the layers to create a smaller inner rectangle that served as a bed for our fresh and flavorful filling. This technique allowed us to add more filling than we normally could on top of a flat pastry base for an especially hearty tart. To thaw frozen puff pastry, let it sit either in the refrigerator for 1 day or on the counter for 30 minutes to 1 hour.

1 (9½ by 9-inch) sheet puff pastry, thawed and cut in half

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 large fennel bulb, stalks discarded, bulb halved, cored, and sliced thin

3 garlic cloves, minced

½ cup dry white wine

½ cup pitted oil-cured black olives, chopped

1 teaspoon grated lemon zest plus 1 tablespoon juice

Salt and pepper

8 ounces goat cheese, softened

5 tablespoons chopped fresh basil

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Lay puff pastry on parchment-lined baking sheet and poke all over with fork. Bake pastry until puffed and golden brown, about 15 minutes, rotating baking sheet halfway through baking. Using tip of paring knife, cut ½-inch-wide border around top edge of each pastry, then press centers down with fingertips.

2. Meanwhile, heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add fennel and cook until softened and browned, about 10 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook until fragrant, 30 seconds. Add wine, cover, and cook for 5 minutes. Uncover and cook until liquid has evaporated and fennel is very soft, 3 to 5 minutes. Off heat, stir in olives and lemon juice and season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Mix goat cheese, ¼ cup basil, remaining 2 tablespoons oil, lemon zest, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in bowl, then spread evenly over center of pastry shells. Spoon fennel mixture over top.

4. Bake tarts until cheese is heated through and crust is deep golden, 5 to 7 minutes. Sprinkle with remaining 1 tablespoon basil. Serve.

serves 4

to make ahead

Tarts can be held at room temperature for up to 2 hours before baking.

making a puff pastry tart shell



1. Lay pastry rectangles on parchment-lined baking sheet and poke all over with fork. Bake pastry until puffed and golden, about 15 minutes.



2. Using tip of paring knife, cut ½-inch border around top edge of each baked shell and press center down with your fingertips to create bed for filling.





herbed spinach dip

serves 4 to 6

why this recipe works Spinach dip can feel like the responsible, healthy choice on an appetizer buffet but that doesn't mean it has to be bland or boring. For a spinach dip to really taste good, we found that both the ingredients and the method were key. We packed tons of flavor into our spinach dip with herbs, red bell pepper, scallions, garlic, and even a little kick of hot sauce. For the mixing method, we used the food processor to help distribute the spinach evenly throughout the dip. This method also made it easy to add other flavors to the dip for our creative variations. The garlic must be minced or pressed before going into the food processor or else the dip will contain large chunks of garlic. Serve with crudité.

1 (10-ounce) package frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry

½ red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and chopped fine

½ cup sour cream

½ cup mayonnaise

½ cup packed fresh parsley leaves

1 tablespoon fresh dill or 1 teaspoon dried

3 scallions, sliced thin

1 garlic clove, minced

¼ teaspoon hot sauce

Salt and pepper

Process all ingredients with ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper in food processor until well combined, about 1 minute. Transfer to serving bowl, cover, and refrigerate until flavors have blended, at least 1 hour. Season with salt and pepper to taste before serving.

variations

spinach dip with blue cheese and bacon

Omit red bell pepper, dill, salt, and hot sauce. Add ⅓ cup crumbled blue cheese to food processor with spinach. Sprinkle with 2 slices cooked, crumbled bacon before serving.

spinach dip with feta, lemon, and oregano

Omit red bell pepper, dill, and salt. Add 2 tablespoons fresh

oregano, ½ cup crumbled feta cheese, 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest, and 1 tablespoon lemon juice to food processor with spinach. Season with salt to taste before serving.

cilantro-lime spinach dip

Omit red bell pepper, dill, and hot sauce. Add ¼ cup fresh cilantro leaves, 1 tablespoon chopped canned chipotle chile in adobo sauce, ½ teaspoon grated lime zest, 1 tablespoon lime juice, ½ teaspoon light brown sugar, and ⅛ teaspoon cumin to food processor with spinach.

to make ahead

Dip can be refrigerated for up to 1 day.



ham and cheese palmiers

why this recipe works Palmiers are made from puff pastry that has been rolled up and sliced into thin pieces that are said to resemble palm leaves, elephant ears, or butterflies. We retooled this typically sweet pastry into an elegant but easy savory appetizer. We brushed store-bought puff pastry with Dijon mustard, sprinkled it with minced thyme, layered it with thinly sliced ham and Parmesan cheese, and rolled it into a log. To finish the pastries, we simply sliced the log and baked the palmiers until they were golden brown and crispy. To thaw frozen puff pastry, let it sit either in the refrigerator for 24 hours or on the counter for 30 minutes to 1 hour. If the dough becomes too warm and sticky to work with, cover it with plastic wrap and chill it in the refrigerator until firm. To round out this appetizer, consider serving it with farmhouse cheddar cheese and sliced apples.

serves 6 to 8

1 (9½ by 9-inch) sheet puff pastry, thawed

2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme

4 ounces thinly sliced deli ham

2 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (1 cup)

1. Roll puff pastry into 12-inch square on lightly floured counter. Brush evenly with mustard, sprinkle with thyme, lay ham evenly over top (to edge), and sprinkle with Parmesan. Roll up both sides of pastry until they meet in middle. Wrap pastry log in plastic wrap and refrigerate until firm, about 1 hour.

2. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Using sharp knife, trim ends of log, then slice into ⅓-inch-thick pieces and space them about 1 inch apart on prepared baking sheet.

3. Bake until golden brown and crispy, about 25 minutes, rotating baking sheet halfway through baking. Transfer palmiers to wire rack and let cool completely. Palmiers can be held at room temperature for up to 6 hours before serving.

to make ahead

Rollled pastry log can be refrigerated for up to 2 days.

shaping palmiers



1. After layering mustard, thyme, ham, and Parmesan on pastry sheet, tightly roll up pastry from opposite sides until they meet in middle.



2. Once pastry is chilled, slice it into ⅓-inch thick pieces.



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