

Roasted tomatoes and herbed feta crostini

SUMMER ON TOAST

Recipe and photos by **Josee Brisson**

This crostini recipe brings a little bit of summer to your table, with herbed feta and spinach as the spread and roasted cocktail-size tomatoes as the topping. There is nothing better than biting into a warm, crunchy crostino. And whether you call these little toasts crostini, croûtons, croutes or tartines, they are bound to please your palate and reap praise from your family or guests. You can top them with pretty much anything that strikes your fancy. When you make crostini, the most important ingredient is the baguette. Buy the best quality you can find. Refrain from purchasing mass-produced bupkis. Visit a good bakery and choose a baguette with a crisp, golden crust and plenty of alveoli (air pockets). Made with sheep's milk or a mixture of sheep's and goat's milk, Greek feta is a compacted white cheese formed into blocks that are then submerged in brine. Cheesemakers create similar white brined cheeses throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and around the Black Sea. You can use your favourite one for this recipe. I find that frozen spinach is much more manageable than fresh spinach, especially at this time of year. Picked at its freshest, then frozen and packaged immediately, frozen spinach is considerably less expensive than its fresh counterpart. It would take an inordinate amount of fresh spinach to equal the amount needed here. For a garden-fresh taste, I prepare the spinach and herbs raw and add them to the feta, rather than to the tomatoes. You'll find cocktail-size tomatoes in most grocery stores. They are usually a lot sweeter than other varieties, especially in winter. These beauties will release their natural sugars as they roast in the oven. But to be on the safe side, always add a pinch of sugar to help cut down the tomatoes' acidity. Keep leftover tomato mixture in the refrigerator. Heat it up to devour with fresh bread.

ROASTED TOMATOES AND HERBED FETA CROSTINI

Serves 2 people

Preheat oven at 375°

10 cocktail-size tomatoes (or Campari)

3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon of balsamic vinegar

1 large garlic clove, crushed with a garlic press
1 cup of feta cheese, at room temperature
1/3 cup of packed frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
2 sprigs of Italian parsley
1 sprig of basil
1 sprig of rosemary
1 sprig of thyme
Pinch of sugar
Pinch of hot pepper flakes (to taste)
French grey sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper
Balsamic glaze
Baguette

Wash and dry the tomatoes. Cut them into quarters and place them in a shallow oven-proof skillet. Add the olive oil, balsamic vinegar, garlic and hot pepper flakes. Sprinkle a pinch of sugar, season with salt and pepper and mix well. Place in the oven and bake for 30-35 minutes. While tomatoes bake, crumble feta into a shallow mixing bowl, mash with a fork, and season with pepper. Chop the spinach and add to the bowl. Remove herb leaves from their sprigs, chop finely and add to the feta. Mix until well combined and set aside. When the tomatoes are fragrant and wilted, remove them from the oven and set aside to cool. Set the oven on broil. Arrange 14 half-inch slices of baguette on a cookie sheet and broil until golden. Remove the cookie sheet from the oven. Turn each slice and spread one tablespoon of feta mixture onto the unbaked side. Return to the oven and broil until the cheese starts bubbling.



Arrange the crostini on a wooden board or a serving plate. Top each crostino with a few tomatoes and some of the oil, and drizzle with balsamic glaze. Serve immediately.

Pair these delightful crostini with Naoussa, a fruity red wine from Domaine Thymiopoulos in Greece, served slightly chilled to highlight the rosemary perfectly. I also served **Anthìlia**, a Sicilian medium-bodied,

fruity white by Donnafugata, with a floral and mineral nose.