

Goat Cheese Stuffed Phyllo Balls with Mushrooms, Spinach, Pine Nuts & Bacon Filling

Makes 12 appetizers

The 3" brioche molds used for this appetizer create a beautiful presentation. If you want a healthier version of this recipe, substitute oil for butter.

For the Phyllo packages:

2 slices bacon, cut into ½ inch slices

3 tablespoons shallots, chopped

¾ pound mushrooms, mixed varieties such as chanterelles, Portobello, and shiitake, sliced

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 1/4 pounds fresh spinach

¼ cup pine nuts, toasted

5 ounces goat cheese log, cut into 6 rounds (approximately 1/3rd inch thick)

6 sheets phyllo dough

6 tablespoons melted butter

2 pinches ground nutmeg

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon black pepper, ground

For the Salad:

2 pounds baby heirloom tomatoes

1 ½ tablespoons sherry vinegar

1 tablespoon shallots, chopped

2 pinches salt

1 pinch black pepper, ground

1 tablespoon fresh basil, sliced thin

2/3 cup extra virgin olive oil

To make the filling:

1. In a 12-inch skillet, cook bacon until the fat is released and the meat is almost crispy. Leaving the fat in the pan, remove the bacon and drain on paper towels.
2. Add the shallots to the pan and sauté until translucent about 1 minute (do not let shallots get brown or they turn bitter).
3. Add the mushrooms to the pan and season with $\frac{1}{2}$ of the salt and pepper. Cook the mushrooms and shallots for about 2 to 3 minutes, or until the mushrooms are cooked and most of the moisture has evaporated. Remove the mixture from the pan and set aside to cool.
4. In another large skillet, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil. Add the spinach and season with the remaining salt and pepper. Cook until just wilted, about 1 to 2 minutes.
5. Remove the spinach from the pan, drain completely in cheesecloth or a colander, and let cool to room temperature.
6. In a large mixing bowl, combine cooled mushroom mixture with spinach, bacon, and pine nuts. Mix well and season with additional salt and pepper to taste, if necessary.

To form phyllo packages:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Brush a sheet of phyllo with the melted butter, making sure that the longer side of the phyllo is facing you. Lay a second sheet of phyllo on top of it, and again brush evenly with butter.
3. Trim $\frac{1}{2}$ inch off of each side of the phyllo, to create smooth edges on the rectangle.
4. Next, cut the rectangle into 12 phyllo squares as follows: using a sharp knife, cut the phyllo vertically in half down the center. Then cut each section in half again to create four equal sections. Next, cut the horizontal side of the phyllo into 3 equal sections to create 12 squares.
5. Pick up 2 squares and create a “star” by placing one square diagonally on top of the other. Place the “star” into a 3-inch brioche mold, butter side up, and press down carefully into the sides and bottom of the mold.

6. Lay a third phyllo square on a work surface and place one heaping tablespoon of the filling in the center.
7. Cut a goat cheese round in half and place one piece on top of the spinach filling.
8. Bring the edges of the phyllo square around the filling and cheese to enclose and form a ball. Turn the ball over and place it, seam side down, into the center of the brioche mold.
9. Continue this method for all of the remaining phyllo dough.
10. Place the brioche molds onto a sheet pan, and bake in preheated oven for approximately 8 minutes, or until golden brown and flaky.

To make the salad:

1. Whisk together the vinegar, shallots, salt and pepper. While whisking, slowly pour the olive oil into the mixture until an emulsion is formed. Stir in sliced basil.
2. Slice the baby heirloom tomatoes in half and place them in a mixing bowl. Add the dressing and toss to coat.