

Burrata with Pickled Cherry Peppers and Tomatoes

Yield: 1-2 as a main course salad, 4 as an appetizer

Burrata...oh how I love thee. My life was forever changed when I had my first taste of this creamy masterpiece of a cheese. I remember everything about that day. Now, my life's mission is to incorporate burrata into every possible dish I can. This is a beautiful light appetizer that can easily double as a salad for one to two people (I mean, I can eat the whole thing by myself...don't kid yourself). The pickled peppers and tomatoes cut through the richness of the creamy cheese, and the arugula provides a peppery bite, and turns this into a more substantial starter. It's a Caprese salad reinvented with burrata, arugula and pickled peppers and tomatoes.

1 ounce baby arugula

1/4 cup loosely packed basil, cut into chiffonade

1 to 2 balls of burrata

2 tablespoons thick balsamic vinegar (glaze), plus more to taste*

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

PICKLED CHERRY PEPPER AND TOMATOES:**

16 cherry peppers, rinsed

2 cups white vinegar

1/2 cup water

2 tablespoons sugar

2 cloves garlic, cut into thirds

1 teaspoon salt

3/4 teaspoon whole black peppercorns

1 bay leaf

1 cup cherry tomatoes, rinsed and halved/quartered (depending on the size)

CROSTINI:

1/2 baguette, sliced thinly into 1/4-inch-thick slices

Extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

*If you do not have a high-quality thick balsamic vinegar, you can reduce your balsamic over medium heat for approximately 9 to 12 minutes, or until thick and syrupy. Take care not to boil for too long or over too high of heat, or you will end up with balsamic caramel.

**For a quicker recipe, Trader Joe's sells pickled cherry peppers. Drain the peppers and cut into slices; halve the cherry tomatoes. Pour some of the pickling liquid from the jar over both the peppers and tomatoes in a small bowl and sprinkle with salt. Allow to sit in the liquid for at least 30 minutes to pick up the flavors.

To make the pickled peppers and tomatoes: remove the stems of the cherry peppers. Combine the peppers, vinegar, water and sugar in a small saucepan and bring to a boil. In the meantime, put the garlic, salt, peppercorns, and bay leaf in a jar large enough to hold all the peppers and liquid. Once the mixture has come to a boil, pour into the jar and cool with the lid off for at least 30 minutes. Store in the refrigerator once cooled and reserve until ready to use. Approximately 30 minutes before you want to serve, remove about 8 cherry peppers and slice into thin strips. Place into a bowl with about 1/2 cup of the brine and the quartered cherry tomatoes and allow to sit until ready to serve. You will have about twice the amount you need for this recipe, but you can store in the refrigerator for several weeks.

Alternatively, if you can find high-quality store-bought pickled cherry peppers, you can use these, following the recipe at the point of removing the cherry peppers from the brine to prepare to serve.

Preheat the oven to 400°. Lay the sliced baguette on a large baking sheet, drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bake for approximately 7 to 9 minutes, until the crostini are golden brown.

Drizzle about 1 tablespoon of the balsamic around the plate. Arrange the arugula and basil on a serving plate. Place the burrata in the center and arrange the pickled peppers and tomatoes around the burrata, ensuring to drain the brine before adding to the platter. Sprinkle with salt and freshly ground black pepper and drizzle the remaining 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar over the top of the salad. Serve with the crostini.