

Salt and Serenity

Autumn Ricotta and Squash Tartines

Tartine is French for “open-faced sandwich”. They make a great appetizer to have with drinks or a nice light lunch served with a salad.

Makes 4 open faced sandwiches. The recipe makes more squash than you will need for 4 sandwiches. Leftover roasted squash will keep for a few days in the fridge.

1 medium sized butternut squash
2 teaspoons *New Bae seasoning** (or 1 teaspoon kosher salt, 1 teaspoon smoked paprika, ¼ teaspoon cayenne)
3 Tablespoons olive oil
2 sprigs fresh thyme
4 slices good quality bread (such as sourdough, multi-grain or any loaf with some heft and chew),
1 cup ricotta cheese (if you have 15 minutes, make your own –recipe below)
1 cup arugula or other micro green
2 tablespoons honey

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper and set aside. Cut both ends off the butternut squash and peel whole squash. Cut in half lengthwise. Scoop out seeds. Cut squash into ¼ inch thin slices.
2. Place squash slices in a large mixing bowl. Add olive oil and seasonings. Use your hands to mix the squash and ensure that all slices are evenly coated. Spread squash slices out in a single layer on the baking sheets. Remove thyme leaves from sprigs of thyme. Scatter leaves over the squash slices. Bake squash for 35-45 minutes until it is golden brown and just beginning to brown around the edges.
3. Grill or toast the bread slices until lightly charred or nice and brown. Spread ricotta on each slice. Top with a few slices of squash. Pile on some arugula or other micro-greens. Drizzle on honey. Serve right away.

*New Bae Seasoning is available online from primalpalate.com in the USA and naturamarket.ca in Canada.

Homemade Ricotta Cheese

This recipe comes from the September 2009 issue of *Cook's Illustrated*. The real key to good ricotta is to handle it as little as possible. Don't stir too hard, and be very gentle with the curds once they form.

16 cups homogenized milk (whole milk)

1 teaspoon table salt

1/2 -3/4 cups fresh lemon juice (about 5-6 lemons)

1. Heat milk and salt in 7-quart Dutch oven over medium-high, stirring frequently with rubber spatula to prevent scorching, until milk registers 185 degrees F on instant read thermometer, about 15 minutes.
2. Remove pot from heat. Using rubber spatula, slowly stir in 1/2 cup lemon juice until fully incorporated, 15 seconds. Allow milk to stand, undisturbed for 5 minutes. After 5 minutes milk should separate into white solid curds and translucent liquid whey. If after 5 minutes whey is still milky and opaque, add 2 more tablespoons lemon juice, gently stir to combine and let rest 5 minutes longer. Check separation again and repeat with another 2 tablespoons juice until whey is no longer opaque (depending on your milk, whey may appear different shades of yellow or blue). Once milk is separated into curds and whey allow pot to rest for 20 minutes.
3. Line colander or large strainer with double layer of cheesecloth and set over sink. Using large spoon, carefully spoon curds into colander. Discard whey. Using rubber spatula, gently fold curds over themselves until liquid no longer runs out of colander and curds have texture of grainy cream cheese. Use immediately or transfer to an airtight container and refrigerate for up to 4 days.