

Column 609 –How to Make Perfect Crostini

The college football season is about to begin, and there is still time to start planning your game-day menus. I love putting together various finger foods to help us cheer on our favorite teams (NDSU Bison and Notre Dame Fighting Irish), and these Basic Crostini are one of my go-to options whenever I need a quick and easy savory appetizer.

Crostini, which means "little toasts" in Italian, are a versatile canvas for a myriad of toppings, much like their cousin, bruschetta. The distinction between these two Italian appetizers lies in their texture. In my Sicilian family, bruschetta is made by grilling large, thick slices of soft, rustic bread until charred but still tender. For crostini, we use a baguette or thin loaf of ciabatta, slicing it into thin pieces and toasting in the oven until golden brown and crispy. The garlicky tomato topping often associated with bruschetta also pairs beautifully with crostini, and both can be enjoyed with a variety of toppings, sparking endless culinary creativity.

I use one loaf of a good, French baguette to make my Basic Crostini, and my favorite loaves can be found at Breadsmith and Panera (if you have any other local sources for good baguettes, please send them my way!). I slice the baguette along the bias (diagonal) into thin pieces about a quarter-inch thick and then brush each side with extra-virgin olive oil.

Next, I season the tops with a sprinkling of kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, you can add other herbs and spices at this stage or skip the seasonings altogether so that you can enjoy them with sweet toppings, too, like peanut butter, Nutella, jams and fruit spreads. I bake the crostini in the oven at 350 degrees for about 15 to 20 minutes until they are golden brown and toasty, and the longer they bake, the crispier they get. Sometimes, depending on the toppings I am serving, I will rub the tops with a clove of garlic as soon as I pull the crostini from the oven for an added touch of flavor.

Crostini are one of my favorite items for party platters because you can make them well in advance and store them in a resealable plastic bag for at least one week at room temperature and several months in the freezer. They thaw quickly, and their versatility makes them adaptable to any menu. You can vary the toppings to reflect the colors of your favorite team or even the season, if serving for a holiday. I like to serve my Basic Crostini with soft cheeses and savory spreads, like pesto and pate, while Gio enjoys them with savory and sweet toppings, and Tony prefers them au naturel, with no toppings.

Simple, rustic, and delicious—that is the beauty of these Basic Crostini. No matter how I serve them, they are always a touchdown on my gameday party platters.

Basic Crostini

Makes: 20 appetizers

Ingredients:

1 baguette loaf, sliced ¼-inch thick
Extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher or flaky salt
Freshly ground black pepper
1 clove of garlic, peeled and root end removed

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Place the baguette slices on the baking sheet in a single layer. Brush both the top and bottom of each slice with olive oil, then lightly sprinkle the tops with salt and pepper. Other herbs and seasonings may also be added at this stage.

Bake the crostini until they are golden brown and toasted, about 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from the oven and immediately rub the garlic clove over the top of each crostini (if using). Serve warm or transfer the crostini to a wire rack to cool completely. Enjoy with your favorite toppings, like soft cheese, pesto, tomatoes, pate, etc.

Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 1 week or in the freezer for several months.

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