

Roasted Red Peppers with Feta

Cuisine: Spanish

Category: Vegetable

Occasion: Side dish

Servings: 4

Ingredients:

4 large red bell peppers
approx. ½ pound/200 grams feta cheese
½ cup extra virgin olive oil
32 fresh basil leaves

Instructions:

This easy-to-prepare appetizer, with its stunning colors and flavors, is a tasty starter on any festive occasion. It is a modern combination of strong Mediterranean influences, yet its origins are ancient and span several continents and cultures. The sweet, meaty red peppers (capsicums) are relatives of the pungent chili, introduced to the Old World by Columbus. They contrast with the tangy feta cheese made from sheep's or goat's milk. The strong salty feta is mellowed by olive oil, described lyrically by Lawrence Durrell as "a taste older than meat, older than wine. A taste as old as cold water." Basil, meaning "royal," was once a sacred herb, and the gathering process was a ritual. But enough of these musings; let's get on with the cooking!

Method:

Oil a shallow baking sheet. Set the oven at 200C. Wash the peppers, cut in two lengthways and remove seeds. Rub oil over the outer skins and place the peppers, cut side down, on the baking tray. Roast in the oven for 20 minutes or until the skins appear blackened and blistered. Remove from the oven, place peppers in a plastic bag (freezer bag is ideal) and knot the neck of the bag. The peppers will cook a little more in their own steam, which will lift the tough skins from the flesh. When cool, peel away the skins. Retain the pepper liquid. While the peppers are cooking, drain the feta and crumble it into a small bowl. Slowly add olive oil; mix well with a fork.

Set 4 plates on the table (white plates are particularly good with these colors). Cut each half pepper into 4 equal pieces. Place 4 pieces, skinned side down, on each plate. Cover each with a basil leaf and spread with 2 full teaspoons of feta cheese. Place another basil leaf on the feta and top with yet another layer of

pepper. Think up imaginative patterns! For a final touch, mix retained pepper liquid with more olive oil in a 1: 4 mixture and drizzle in circular swirls.

Serve with hot, fresh, crusty French bread or ciabatta. Bon appetit!

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Submitted by Alan Swann, England UK. IPA Bulletin Volume 15 No. 4, December 1998.