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Colorful, creamy pepper poppers make the perfect side dish

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Ricotta & Feta Pepper Poppers Photo Susie Iventosch

if you have time and the interest, even if making your own cheese at home sounds a bit daunting, this ricotta recipe is super easy and really fun to do. It takes about 20 minutes or so to heat the milk and cream to the right temperature and then it's just a matter of how firm or soft you want your cheese to be that will determine the total time involved.

Whole milk makes much better ricotta than low-fat milk, and it's best to find one that is not ultra-pasteurized. Ultra-pasteurized milk is not recommended because it has already been heated to a very high temperature of 280 degrees Fahrenheit which prevents it from curdling properly. Normally-pasteurized milk has been heated to a much lower temperature of between 145 and 161 degrees. You need the curds and whey to separate for making ricotta, so just stick to normally-pasteurized milk for this project.

Back in the April 1, 2020 issue, we featured a recipe for homemade ricotta cheese. It's really fun to make and so delicious! Since then, we've used that recipe as an ingredient in many other recipes including these delicious pepper poppers.

Mini sweet peppers are so beautiful and colorful and they are absolutely delicious roasted with ricotta and feta cheese. The tangy flavor of the feta is the perfect foil to these mini sweet peppers. Just stuff them and roast them until the cheese is beginning to brown for a perfect side dish to any meal or the main course for any vegetarians in your crowd. You can prepare the peppers a few hours ahead of time and refrigerate them until you're ready to bake them for dinner.?

If you don't have time or if you're not interested in making homemade ricotta, then you can easily substitute store-bought ricotta to use in this recipe. But,

Ricotta & Feta Pepper Poppers

INGREDIENTS

24 mini sweet peppers in multiple colors red, orange, and yellow

1 cup ricotta cheese (see recipe below for homemade ricotta)

1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese

1 teaspoon lemon pepper

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon white pepper

1 teaspoon freshly squeezed lemon juice

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 400 F. Spray a baking sheet or casserole dish with PAM or equivalent.

Prepare the peppers:

Lay peppers on a cutting board. Cut a small triangle on the top side of each of the peppers (see photo) with the wide part at the top near the stem. Leave the stem intact if possible. Remove the triangle and set aside for your salad tonight. Now, scoop out any remaining seeds with a grapefruit spoon. Set aside. (You can also just take the easy route and cut them in half before filling them.)

Mix all remaining ingredients in a small bowl.

Assembly:

Using a small spoon or pastry bag, stuff peppers to the top of the opening with the cheese mixture. Place peppers, stuffing side up, on your baking sheet or casserole dish.

Bake at 400 F for approximately 15-20 minutes, or until cheese is bubbling and beginning to brown.

Serve piping hot!

Homemade Ricotta Cheese

INGREDIENTS

8 cups whole milk

1/2 cup heavy cream

1 1/2 teaspoons sea salt

2 tablespoons fresh-squeezed lemon juice (strained pulp out)

2 tablespoons rice vinegar (can also use white wine vinegar)

DIRECTIONS

In a medium-large pot, slowly heat the milk and cream together until it reaches 185 F, stirring occasionally along the way. The best way to measure the temperature is to clip a candy or instant-read thermometer to the side of the pot when you first begin the process.

While the milk mixture is heating, line a colander with cheesecloth and sit it over a bowl. Set aside. Mix the lemon juice and vinegar in a small container.

Once the temperature reaches 185 F, remove the pot from the heat and immediately stir in the salt. Slowly drizzle the lemon juice and rice vinegar over the top. Stir gently with a silicon spoon or spatula until the curds begin to form.

Ladle the curds into the colander and roll any loose edges of cheesecloth over the top of the cheese. Allow to drain until it reaches the consistency you desire. This can take anywhere from 20 minutes to a few hours, depending upon how firm you like your ricotta. Store the cheese in an airtight container for up to two weeks in the refrigerator.





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