Mushroom and Roquefort Tarts are the Favorite Dish on the Menu

At a recent cooking class featuring a menu of Parisian-inspired dishes, my students were most enthusiastic about the simple first course—individual mushroom and Roquefort tarts. There was a fork-tender veal and tomato ragoût as an entree, a vibrant salad of haricots verts, oranges, and Belgian endive in orange vinaigrette, and for dessert a walnut rum gateau with chocolate icing plus homemade vanilla ice cream. Yet, these simple tarts garnered by far the most attention.

Their golden, flaky crusts were definitely part of the allure. We cut purchased sheets of puff pastry into squares and then with a sharp knife traced a border inside each square. The filling--a sauté of mushrooms scented with garlic and rosemary, combined with crème fraiche and crumbled Roquefort—was mounded inside the borders of each square. When baked the borders magically rose up around the filling, forming the sides of the tart shells.

While the tarts were in the oven, I mentioned that I had prepared the recipe with other fillings. Asparagus and sautéed shiitakes scented with lemon and Gruyère were perfect for spring, while thinly sliced cherry tomatoes and baby zucchini with goat cheese was delicious in the summer.

These mushroom tarts look as if they take far more effort to assemble than they do. Count on 20 minutes for the filling, and another 5 for cutting out the pastry squares. Both the squares and filling can be prepared several hours ahead so at serving time you will need only to spoon the mushroom mélange in the shells, then bake them for 20 minutes.

**Mushroom and Roquefort Puff Pastry Tarts**

2 tbsp unsalted butter

2 tbsp canola oil

10 oz brown mushrooms, ends trimmed and mushrooms sliced thinly

1 1/4 tsp minced garlic

1 tsp dried crushed rosemary

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 sheet puff pastry from a 17.3 ounce package, defrosted (Pepperidge Farm works well.)

1/4 cup crème fraîche

1/4 cup crumbled Roquefort

Fresh rosemary sprigs for garnish

1. Arrange a rack at center position and preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

2 Melt butter and oil in a medium skillet over medium high heat. When hot, add mushrooms and garlic and sauté, stirring, until softened, lightly browned, and all liquid has evaporated, 6 to 7 minutes or longer.

3. Remove mushrooms with a slotted spoon to a large shallow bowl or pie plate, and pat dry with paper towels. Stir in rosemary, generous 1/4 teaspoon salt, and several grinds of black pepper. Cool mixture to room temperature, then stir in the crème fraiche and Roquefort. Taste and season with more salt if needed. (Filling can be prepared 3 hours ahead; cover and refrigerate. Bring to room temperature 30 minutes before using.)

4. Place puff pastry sheet on a lightly floured work surface, and with a rolling pin, gently flatten the seams. Cut sheet into four equal squares. With a sharp knife, lightly score a 3/4- inch border around the inside edge of each pastry square, taking care not to cut all the way through the dough. (You simply want to trace a frame within each square, which will rise around the filling and form the sides of each tart.) Transfer squares to a baking sheet. (Squares can be prepared 2 hours ahead; cover and refrigerate.)

5. Divide mushroom mixture evenly and mound within borders of each square. Bake tarts until sides have puffed and are golden brown and filling is hot, 15 to 20 minutes. Watch carefully.

6. Garnish each tart with a fresh rosemary sprig. Serves 4.

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