

Change up your pizza—make it with phyllo pastry

Today's recipe is a great one for the approaching cold weather and holiday season. The phyllo pizza is a super addition to a bowl of homemade soup and a salad on a cold evening for supper. And, it also makes a great party appetizer.

There are a couple of tricks though. First of all, if you have never used phyllo pastry before, it comes rolled up in a box in the freezer section. You can usually find it where you find the frozen pie and tart shells. You need to let it thaw overnight in the fridge. It can stay in the fridge up to several days. Don't leave it too long or it will go bad—just like any other pastry.

When getting ready to make your pizza, have all the other ingredients prepped and ready to go before you take the pastry out of the fridge or out of the box. Once you are ready, then remove the pastry from the box and unroll all the layers onto a cookie sheet lined with a piece of parchment paper. Then, put one or two pieces of parchment paper on top of the layers of phyllo. Top that off with a barely damp tea towel. This will keep the pastry moist enough so that it won't dry out and fall apart while you are making your pizzas. Phyllo is very delicate and needs to be handled carefully.

Next, when you are putting the layers together, you can either use butter, like it calls for in the recipe, or you can use non-stick cooking spray for less calories (but also a little less flavour). However, the physical result is the same. The recipe calls for you to cut the pastry in half so that the pizza is only half the size of a full sheet of phyllo. There are a couple of reasons for that. First of all, it will fit better on a household cookie sheet. Second, if you make it in a full-sized version, there is a good chance that the centre of the pizza will be damp and the edges will be over done. Best to make the half-sized one.

Now, these particular toppings happen to be my favourite combination. But you can use any combination of toppings that you like. The only thing you have to keep in mind is that all the ingredients must be quite dry; otherwise the phyllo pastry will get too wet and will fall apart. So, go easy on the sauce. Best to use something a little thicker, like pesto or sundried tomato pesto or black olive tapenade. And, any veggies or other ingredients

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must be caramelized first or if they are frozen (like the spinach) then make sure they are thawed and well squeezed out before they go on the pizza.

Last, you can use any type of cheese you like, but I do

suggest that you keep a little mozzarella on the pizza at the very end of the recipe, as it not only tastes yummy, but it acts like a glue that holds all the other ingredients on.

There is a lot of phyllo pastry in a package and you cannot refreeze it. So, be prepared to make lots of pizzas or make some other kind of treat at the same time. You can make a nice apple strudel out of phyllo pastry by layering several layers of pastry, then putting chopped up apples, cinnamon and sugar in the middle and rolling the whole thing up like a log. Bake in the oven and you've got yourself a very nice, easy, homemade dessert.

Have fun and keep cooking!

—Lori and Gerry can be reached at whatscookin@independentfreepress.com

Phyllo Pizzas

Makes 18 appetizer-sized pizza bites

Ingredients

- 2 sheets phyllo pastry
- melted butter
- 1/4 cup pesto sauce
- 1/4 cup frozen chopped spinach
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium cooking onion, sliced thinly
- 4 white mushrooms, sliced thinly
- salt and pepper
- 1/4 cup fresh goat cheese, broken into small pieces
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

Method

Lay one sheet of phyllo pastry on a cookie sheet (ungreased). Lightly brush the pastry with melted butter. Lay next sheet of phyllo on top and brush lightly with melted butter. Cut into two large rectangles. Set one rectangle on top of the other. Making a total of four layers of phyllo pastry.

Spread pesto sauce over entire surface of pizza—very



thinly.

Squeeze all excess water from the spinach and then lay on paper towels to drain further. Set aside.

In a large pan, heat olive oil. Add the sliced onions and mushrooms, cook over medium heat until vegetables are well caramelized. Salt and pepper to taste. Remove from pan and drain on paper towels.

Spread the spinach, onions and mushrooms over the pizza. Spread the pieces of goat cheese over pizza. Spread the mozzarella cheese over the pizza.

Bake in a preheated 400 F degree oven until crispy (approximately 10-15 minutes). Cut and serve immediately.

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