

Winter & Spring Insalata Caprese

In winter or Spring fresh local tomatoes are not available, which makes for a pretty tasteless Insalata Caprese if made in the traditional way. Also, any basil you buy is not likely to be locally grown and fresh. My solution is to make variations with grilled or oven roasted tomatoes (which amplifies their flavors). Depending on the season I top it with arugula pesto (winter), or basil pesto (in the spring). Use whichever you prefer.

One other change to take this salad to another level. In the winter I use *burrata* cheese instead of the more traditional fresh cows milk mozzarella. *Burrata* is a fresh mozzarella which encases fresh cream that gives it even greater richness and flavor. In Spring I use *mozzarella di bufala* (buffalo milk mozzarella). You can change these up based on your preference.

6 servings

- 10-12 oz. mini plum or cherry tomatoes
- extra virgin olive oil
- 4 / 4 ounce balls of buratta cheese or fresh mozzarella di bufala
- 3 ounces fresh arugula or basil pesto
 - arugula - optional for garnish
- balsamic glaze - optional for drizzle
- flaky sea salt
- one baguette for crostini



To Grill or Roast Tomatoes:

1. Fold heavy duty foil, 2 to 3 times to make it thicker. Fold up the edges to form a shallow vessel. Drizzle olive oil on the foil, add the tomatoes and toss to coat.
2. Grill over medium to medium-high heat until they are softened, and some are a little blackened and start to burst. Transfer to a covered container and refrigerate until ready to use.
3. Alternately if you don't want to grill them you could accomplish the same thing in the oven using high heat (425 F), or a broiler with the pan down a couple of levels from the top.

Preparing Crostini:

1. Slice the loaf at an angle. Place the slices on a metal tray, and brush them lightly with extra virgin olive oil.
2. Toast them over medium heat on my barbecue grill, flipping with tongs when ready, until toasty on both sides. I do this when I grill my tomatoes,
3. Re-warm briefly in an oven before serving. Place in a bread basket next to the Insalata Caprese.

Preparing Salad:

1. Place arugula on a platter. With a spoon, carefully remove burrata from it's brine and gently dry it with a paper towel. Place burrata atop the arugula.
2. Top burrata balls with the grilled (or roasted) tomatoes.
3. Top with pesto, allowing it to drip down the sides of the tomatoes and cheese.
4. Drizzle with balsamic glaze if desired. Sprinkle with flaky sea salt.