

THE SHARED TABLE

Vegetarian and vegan feasts
to cook for your crowd

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LOADED BAKED BRIE

Baked brie is a massive crowd-pleaser. It's absolutely beautiful and very easy to create. Camembert works just as well too, but it's essential that you use a whole wheel of cheese, rather than a wedge, or you'll have a melted explosion on your hands.

You can top these babies with just about anything, depending on your taste, and what you have available. I think the key is to have plenty of sweetness on top (chutney, cranberry sauce, honey, jam or even just brown sugar), along with some texture (nuts, seeds) and extra flavour (balsamic vinegar, herbs, pesto). Some of my favourite toppings are: walnuts, pesto, chilli jam or fresh chilli, pine nuts, sliced and roasted mushrooms or capsicum (bell pepper), and herbs of any kind.

Another big bonus is that you can assemble everything ahead of time, then simply bake the cheese wheels when you're ready to eat.

Makes 2 wheels; serves 10 as a starter

INGREDIENTS:

1 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
1 tbsp butter
1 large red onion, sliced
2 tbsp brown sugar
3 tbsp balsamic vinegar, plus extra for drizzling
4 tbsp pepitas (pumpkin seeds)
1 tbsp honey
2 tsp smoked paprika
2-3 tbsp cranberry sauce
2 wheels of brie, each weighing about 200-250 g (7-9 oz)
1 handful thyme leaves
1 handful rosemary leaves
toasted baguette slices, bread or crackers, to serve

METHOD:

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F).

In a frying pan, heat the olive oil and butter. Add the onion and cook over medium heat for about 10 minutes, stirring often. Once the onion has started caramelising, add the sugar, 2 tablespoons of the balsamic vinegar, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook for a further 5-10 minutes, stirring often. If the onion seems too sticky, add another splash of vinegar. Transfer to a bowl.

Add the pepitas to the same pan with another drizzle of olive oil. Cook over low heat until the seeds begin to pop. Add the honey, paprika and a good pinch of salt. Cook for another 1-2 minutes, then set aside.

To assemble, place the wheels of cheese on a baking tray lined with baking paper. Spread the cranberry sauce over each one, then top with the balsamic onion. Divide the herbs over each wheel, reserving a few sprigs for garnishing. Add the honeyed pumpkin seeds. Finish by drizzling a little more olive oil and vinegar over the top.

Bake for about 15 minutes, or until the toppings are sizzling hot and the inside of the cheese is melted (the wheels will have slumped, as they'll be runny inside).

Garnish with the reserved herbs and serve immediately, with your carb of choice.