

Extra Virgin - Mozzarella and Magic August 21, 2011

With their impending Tuscan trip just days away things are more hectic than ever at the Mazar home. Debi and Gabriele decide to take a breath and plan a special day for their daughters Evelena and Giulia. They treat the girls to a magic themed party in their backyard complete with Gabriele as the head magician. Evelena and Giulia help with the preparations and make homemade mozzarella cheese from scratch. Later Debi and Gabriele finish the party's menu, which includes homemade pizza, bruschetta with mozzarella and tomato, pasta with pesto, and organic marble cupcakes.

1. Bruschetta Pizzaiola by Gabriele Corcos and Debi Mazar

Ingredients

1 baguette, sliced
1 (8-ounce) ball fresh mozzarella
1 pint cherry tomatoes, quartered
1 handful fresh basil, plus more for garnish
Extra-virgin olive oil, for serving
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Directions



Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F.

On a high heat, toast the bread using a stovetop grill, then set aside on a cookie sheet pan.

In a bowl, mix together the mozzarella and tomatoes, season very lightly with olive oil and salt and pepper. Stir well and top the bread with the mixture and place on the sheet pan.

Cook in the oven for about 10 minutes, or until the cheese has melted and starts to crisp into a nice golden color, then place in a platter and allow to cool off for a few minutes before serving.

Dress with a couple leaves freshly picked basil, a drizzle of extra-virgin oil, salt, and pepper.

2. Fresh Mozzarella Balls by Gabriele Corcos and Debi Mazar

Ingredients

2 tablespoons kosher salt
4 cups water
1 pound fresh mozzarella cheese curd (Can be found at specialty stores and online.)

Directions



Add 2 tablespoons salt to 4 cups simmering water.

Chop the cheese curd and add to a large bowl. Pour the simmering water over the chopped curds.

Use 2 wooden spoons to push the curds together to make one ball. Move the ball around in the water for roughly 1 minute so it can become pliable.

While wearing thick dishwashing gloves, remove the curd from the water and pull it into a long cord and fold it back onto itself. Do not overwork the cheese or it will become tough.

Pinch off the mozzarella to create balls and tuck the end under each ball for a neat appearance.

Place the mozzarella into a bowl of cool water.

Store in the salted water you used to soften the curd.

Notes

Fresh mozzarella curd can be purchased from specialty store or an online purveyor.

3. Fresh Pesto by Gabriele Corcos and Debi Mazar

Ingredients

4 cups (about 4 ounces) fresh basil leaves
1/3 cup toasted pine nuts
3 cloves garlic, peeled
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 cup freshly grated Pecorino Sardo or Romano
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Serving suggestion: Cooked pasta.

Directions



Combine the basil, pine nuts, garlic, and oil in a food processor and blend until a paste forms.

Add the Parmesan cheese, Pecorino cheese, salt, and pepper and pulse until smooth.

This is a crucial moment for your pesto, as you need to season with salt and pepper. Keep in mind that Parmigiano and Pecorino are

both dry and salty cheeses, you have to taste your sauce a few times in order not to go overboard when you are seasoning it.

Cover the pesto and keep in the refrigerator until you're ready to use it.

Mix the pasta and the pesto, serve garnished with some grated Parmesan (just a touch), fresh ground pepper and a drizzle of olive oil.

Notes

Important: Dose your sauce.... some people like the sauce thin, others like it very dense....which basically means less or more sauce that goes in the pasta...The Genovese tradition is to use a small ladle of the pasta water-the one you boiled the pasta in-and use it to dilute the sauce when you mix it in the pasta.

4. Fruit Salad: Macedonia by Gabriele Corcos and Debi Mazar

Ingredients

1 pound strawberries, hulled and quartered
1 pint blueberries
1 pint blackberries
1 pint raspberries
Juice of 3 oranges
Juice of 1 lemon
2 tablespoons sugar, optional
Small handful fresh mint, leaves picked and chopped



Directions

Chop the strawberries and add to a large bowl with the blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries.

Add the orange juice, lemon juice, sugar, if using, and mint. Cover with plastic wrap and put in the refrigerator to marinate for at least a couple of hours.

5. Organic Cupcakes by Gabriele Corcos and Debi Mazar

Ingredients

1 (16.2 ounce) box organic vanilla cake mix (recommended: Dr. Oetker)
3 eggs
2/3 cup whole milk
1/2 cup oil
4 ounces 72-percent dark chocolate, chopped
Confectioners' sugar, for garnish

Directions



Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Place the paper baking cups into the cupcake molds.

Melt the chocolate in adding it to a small glass bowl set over a simmering saucepan of water and stirring until it melts. Stir in the milk to thin it out a bit.

Follow the package instructions and prepare the vanilla cake mix. Blend the cake mix with 3 eggs, 2/3 cup milk, and 1/2 cup oil. Pour 1/2 the mix in a separate bowl. Mix the melted chocolate into one of the bowls and stir for a couple of minutes, until you have reached a nice dark colored mix.

In each cupcake mold, use 1/2 vanilla and 1/2 chocolate mix, bake for 20 to 25 minutes.

Serve with a sprinkle of confectioners' sugar.

Notes

Two notes about my cupcake philosophy: More cupcakes, less icing!

First. Kids need to know that cupcakes are good, regardless of the color of the icing...

I cannot count how many kids I have seen digging their faces into their blue fluffed out cupcakes' icing, and actually never making it to the actual dough. I call it the icing tantrum...it happens almost immediately!!!