

## Creamy Artichoke and Spinach Dip

Prep Time: 10 min    Level:    Serves:  
Inactive Prep Time: —    Easy    3 1/2 cups  
Cook Time: 35 min

### Ingredients

- 8 cups fresh spinach
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 lemon, zest finely grated
- 2 (14-ounce) cans artichoke hearts, drained and coarsely chopped
- 6 ounces (about 1 1/2 cups) Parmesan, freshly grated, divided
- 3/4 cup sour cream
- 3/4 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon bottled cayenne pepper sauce
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

### Directions

Serving suggestion: Pita Chips, for dipping

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Spray 1 1/2-quart casserole dish with cooking spray; set aside

Blanch spinach. Squeeze excess water.

In a medium bowl, mix together spinach, garlic and lemon zest. Add artichoke hearts, 1-cup Parmesan, sour cream, mayonnaise and cayenne pepper sauce. Mix. Place into prepared casserole dish. Bake for 30 minutes. The last 5 minutes add the remaining 1/2 cup of Parmesan to the top. Serve hot or cold along with pita chips.

# Crescent-Wrapped Brie

Serve this elegant, yet easy, appetizer with one or more of the following toppings: chutney, jalapeño jelly, fruit preserves or salsa. *basil tomato + onion with pine nuts*

Prep Time: 20 Min

Total Time: 1 Hr

Makes: 12

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1 can (8 oz) Pillsbury® refrigerated crescent dinner rolls or 1 can (8 oz) Pillsbury® Crescent Recipe Creations® refrigerated seamless dough sheet
- 1 round (8 oz) Brie cheese
- 1 egg, beaten

## DIRECTIONS:

Heat oven to 350°F.

If using crescent rolls: Unroll dough; separate crosswise into 2 sections. Pat dough and firmly press perforations to seal, forming 2 squares. If using dough sheet: Unroll dough; cut crosswise into 2 rectangles. Pat dough to form 2 squares.

Place 1 square on ungreased cookie sheet. Place cheese on center of dough. With small cookie or canapé cutter, cut 1 shape from each corner of remaining square; set cutouts aside.

Place remaining square on top of cheese round. Press dough evenly around cheese; fold bottom edges over top edges. Gently stretch dough evenly around cheese; press to seal completely. Brush with beaten egg. Top with cutouts; brush with additional beaten egg.

Bake 20 to 24 minutes or until golden brown. Cool 15 minutes. Serve warm.

# Fruit And Cheese Tray

Making a **Fruit and Cheese Tray** seems easy enough to some people, but I have had a number of people ask me questions about the task so I decided to write down some suggestions.

Entertaining frequently includes some kind of cheese tray, often with fruit or vegetables or meat or a combination of these foods. If you are short on time you can, of course, buy a fruit and cheese tray at most good quality grocery stores or online. But if you have the time this is an opportunity to be creative and introduce your guests to some new cheeses. It's great fun!

## What Cheese Should You Use And How Much?

The number of cheeses you will need (or want to have) for your party tray depends on how elaborate you wish to make it and this often depends on what occasion it is for, who your guests will be and how many of them.

Only you can decide this issue but I usually allow 2-3 ounces of cheese per person. In addition, I almost always have three cheeses on the tray:

- One soft ripened such as Brie cheese, or Chaource that spread easily on a cracker and go well with most fruits
- One semi-soft such as a Bleu - I like Stilton cheese, or introduce your guests to a smoked cheese variety,
- One harder cheese such as a quality Cheddar or Gouda.

Having three different cheeses on a cheese platter is pretty standard. Five cheeses is great for a large group and is considered more elaborate.

I like to select cheeses that combine styles, textures and colors. I like to offer different looks, tastes, and feels. And if I am serving more than three, I like to add one or two with different flavor and color.

Occasionally I'll have a theme tray, such all local cheese.

When I have guests coming I realize some are great cheese lovers and some are "beginners." I try to offer a variety of flavors, with enough mild ones available so everyone can be accommodated.

Buy small amounts of different cheeses. This will allow you to introduce your guests to a variety of cheeses but will also ensure you don't have large amounts left over.

**Note: If you do have left over cheese, there are many options for using it, including in sauces and soups.**

Remember to take the cheeses you are using out of the refrigerator 30-45 minutes prior to serving so that they may reach room temperature.

## **What Fruit Will You Use?**

Try for seasonal fruits, local fruit if available and again have three to five different kinds of fruit.

Where I live I frequently have grapes (sometimes two varieties), strawberries, honeydew melon and cantaloupe, kiwi, apples (usually two different kinds) and pears (again, I am blessed to live in an area where these fruits are readily available).

Something else to remember, especially if fresh quality fruits are not readily available: add some quality dried specialty fruits.

## **How To Build Your Fruit And Cheese Tray**

- Serve all soft ripened cheeses in wedges
- Serve fresh soft cheeses like Brie, in the entire form and have a knife to cut and spread it onto crackers or bread
- Semi-soft cheeses should be served pre-cut in the size you desire
- Semi-hard cheeses should be cut into wedges or cubes that expose the cheese to the air
- Hard cheeses should be pre-cut into pieces
- Bleu cheeses should be served in chunks created by your cheese knife
- Arrange cheeses with seasonal fruits cut into bit size pieces (this is also an opportunity to have a few nuts as part of your Fruit and Cheese Tray as well.
- Don't forget your tongs, cheese knives, cheese forks, utensils and/or wooden picks and serving plates and ...don't forget to have a great time!

*Enjoy your Fruit and Cheese Tray and the company of those you share it with!*

## red velvet cake

*This cake makes a stunning appearance with its reddish cake layers and white frosting...perfect for any festive occasion.*

½ c. shortening	1 t. baking soda
1½ c. sugar	¼ t. salt
2 eggs	3 T. baking cocoa
1 t. vanilla extract	1 c. buttermilk
1½ T. red food coloring	1 T. white vinegar
2 c. all-purpose flour	Best-Ever Soft Icing

Beat shortening and sugar at medium speed with an electric mixer until fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating just until yellow disappears. Stir in vanilla and food coloring.

Combine flour, baking soda, salt and cocoa. Stir together buttermilk and vinegar; add to shortening mixture alternately with flour mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture. Beat just until blended after each addition. Pour batter into 2 greased and floured 9" round cake pans; bake at 350 degrees for 25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool in pans on a wire rack 10 minutes; remove from pans. Cool completely on wire racks. Spread Best-Ever Soft Icing between layers and on top and sides of cake. Serves 12.

best-ever soft icing:

¼ c. all-purpose flour	1 t. vanilla extract
1 c. milk	1 c. sugar
1 c. butter, softened	

Whisk together flour and milk in a small saucepan over low heat until thickened. Pour into a mixing bowl; allow mixture to cool. Add butter and remaining ingredients to flour mixture; beat at high speed with an electric mixer until fluffy, about 8 minutes. Makes 3½ cups.