

206 – FROM THE GARDEN

GRILLED EGGPLANT “CAPRESE” SALAD
INDIAN PEPPER, TOMATO, AND PANEER CHEESE KEBABS
INDIAN GRILLED “PUFF PASTRY”
PORTOBELLO MUSHROOM “CHEESE BURGERS”

GRILLED EGGPLANT “CAPRESE” SALAD

Source: How to Grill by Steven Raichlen (Workman Publishing, 2001)

Method: Direct grilling

Serves: 6

For the eggplant:

2 slender eggplants, about 1 pound each
About 2 tablespoons coarse salt (kosher or sea)
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 teaspoons dried oregano
1/2 to 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 to 1 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes (optional)
3 cloves garlic, minced
3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

For the Caprese Salsa:

1 large ripe tomato, seeded and cut into 1/4-inch dice
1 piece fresh mozzarella cheese (about 5 ounces), drained, if necessary, and cut into 1/4-inch dice
8 fresh basil leaves, slivered, plus a few whole sprigs for garnish
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Coarse salt (kosher or sea)
Freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons lemon juice, plus lemon wedges for serving (optional)

Sprinkle the eggplant slices with the salt and let them sit for 30 minutes.
(The salt draws the water out of the eggplant, a process called “disgorging.”)

Set up the grill for direct grilling and preheat to high.

Rinse the eggplant slices under cold water and blot dry with paper towels. Arrange on a baking sheet and drizzle 2 tablespoons of the oil over them, rubbing the oil over the slices with your fingers or a pastry brush. Sprinkle the eggplant slices with half of the oregano, black pepper, hot pepper flakes, if using, garlic, and parsley. Turn the eggplant slices, drizzle with the remaining oil, and sprinkle with the remaining oregano, black pepper, hot pepper flakes, garlic, and parsley.

When ready to cook, arrange the eggplant slices on the hot grate and grill until nicely browned on both sides, 5 to 8 minutes per side. Rotate the slices 90 degrees after 3 minutes to create an attractive crosshatch of grill marks. If the eggplant starts to burn before the slices are tender, lower the heat or move the slices to a cooler section of the grill. Transfer the eggplant slices to plates or a platter and let cool to room temperature. The grilled eggplants can be kept in the refrigerator, covered, for 24 hours. Arrange the eggplant slices in a shingle pattern.

Make the Caprese Salsa. Combine the tomato, mozzarella, basil, oil, and lemon juice in a nonreactive mixing bowl but don't mix them. The salsa can be prepared up to this stage several hours ahead and kept, covered, in the refrigerator.

When ready to serve, add salt and pepper to the salsa and gently toss to mix. Spoon the salsa over the eggplant and garnish with lemon wedges, if using, and basil sprigs.

INDIAN VEGETABLE CHEESE KEBABS

Method: Direct grilling

Advance preparation: None

Serves 4.

4 Poblano Chilies or green bell peppers

4 red ripe tomatoes

1 large or 2 medium red onions

2 pounds paneer cheese, queso blanco, or mozzarella cheese for the basting mixture:

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter

3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh cilantro

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger

2 teaspoons turmeric

Coarse salt (kosher or sea)

1/2 cup sesame seeds

Lemon wedges for serving

You'll also need: wide (at least 3/8 inch wide) metal or bamboo skewers

1. Cut the peppers into 2 inch square pieces, discarding the core and seeds. Cut each tomato into 4 wedges. Cut the seeds and pulp out of each wedge (save them for stock): the remaining piece of tomato should be about 1/4 inch thick. Cut it in half widthwise. Cut the onions in half widthwise and cut each half in quarters. Break the quarters into segments. Cut the cheese into 1-inch cubes.
2. Assemble the kebabs. Skewer a piece of pepper through the flat side. Skewer a piece of tomato on top, followed by a piece of onion. Skewer on a piece of cheese. Repeat in this sequence until all the ingredients are used up.
3. Make the basting mixture. Melt 3 tablespoons butter in a heavy saucepan. Add the cilantro, garlic, ginger, and turmeric and cook over medium heat until fragrant but not brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the remaining butter and cook until melted, 1 minute. Add salt to taste.

4. Set up your grill for direct grilling and preheat to high. Brush and oil the grill grate.

5. Brush the kebabs on all sides with the basting mixture. Sprinkle on all sides with the sesame seeds. Arrange the kebabs on the grill grate and grill until nicely browned on all sides, 2 to 3 minutes per side, turning as the cheese starts to melt and basting with the cilantro garlic butter. Serve at once with lemon wedges for squeezing.

LACHCHA PARATHA **INDIAN “PUFF PASTRY”**

Country of origin: India

Method: direct grilling

Advance preparation: 2 hours for making and rising the dough

Makes 12 to 14 breads

1 envelope active dry yeast

3 tablespoons sugar

1-1/2 cups warm water

4-1/2 to 5 cups unbleached all-purpose flour, plus additional for dusting and rolling

2 teaspoons salt

3 tablespoons plain yogurt

1 tablespoon vegetable oil, plus oil for the bowl

4 tablespoons (1/2 cup) unsalted butter, melted, or more oil

1. Combine the yeast, sugar, and 1/4 cup of the water in a small bowl and let stand until foamy, 5 to 10 minutes.

2. Place 4-1/2 cups flour and the salt in the bowl of a food processor or mixer with a dough hook. With the processor or mixer running, add the yeast mixture, yogurt, and vegetable oil. You're looking for a dough that is soft but not too sticky: add additional flour as needed. Knead the dough until smooth and elastic, 2 to 3 minutes in a processor, 5 to 8 minutes in a mixer, or to 8 minutes by hand.

3. Place the dough in a lightly oiled mixing bowl, turning it to coat all sides with oil. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap, then a clean kitchen towel, and let rise in a warm, draft-free spot until doubled in bulk, 1 to 1-1/2 hours.

4. Punch down the dough and pinch off 2-inch pieces. Roll them between your palms into smooth balls. You should have 12 to 14 balls. Place the balls on a lightly floured baking sheet and cover with a lightly dampened clean kitchen towel. Let rise again until puffy, about 30 minutes.

5. Set up your grill for direct grilling and preheat to medium-high.

6. Rolling, folding, and grilling the dough. In India, this would be done right next to the tandoor. I like to do it at grill side. (I bring a cutting board and rolling pin outside and work next to the grill. Roll out a dough ball on a lightly flowered cutting board to form a flat disk about 6 inches in diameter. Using a pastry brush, brush off any excess flour. Using a second pastry brush, brush the top of the bread with melted butter. Starting at the end closest to you, fold the bread up like an accordion—each pleat should be 1 inch long. This will give you a thin flat rectangle of dough. Now, starting at 1 end, roll the rectangle into a roll (from the top it will look spiraled, like a sticky bun. Finally, using your rolling pin and a little additional flour if necessary, roll out the dough to form another flat disk about 6 inches across. Lightly brush the top with butter. Continue rolling and folding the breads, until all the dough is used up.

7. Brush and oil the grill grate. Arrange the breads, buttered side down, on the grate; a few at a time (don't crowd the grate). Grill each bread until the bottom is crusty and browned and the top is puffed and blistered, 2 to 4 minutes. Lightly brush the top with a little more butter. Invert the bread and grill the other side until lightly browned, 2 to 4 minutes. Lightly brush each bread with more butter as it comes off the grill and serve piping hot. Serve whole, or cut each naan into 3 wedges to serve the traditional way. Thanks to the pleating, folding, and rolling, the bread with puff and separate into thin buttery layers.

VARIATION: TRADITIONAL NAAN

Traditional naan is to Indian barbecue what pita bread is to Middle Eastern grilling (or for that matter, a slab of white bread is to the barbecue of the American South)—an indispensable accompaniment and side dish to the grilled meat. You can use the same dough as above to make naan. Here's how.

1. Prepare the preceding recipe through step 5. Instead of rolling and pleating the dough, roll it into a flat 6 inch disk, then gently slap the disk from one hand to the other to stretch it into an elongated 7- to 8-inch oblong with a narrow end like a teardrop. Lightly brush both sides with butter and grill as described above. Lightly brush with more butter and serve at once.

PORTOBELLO MUSHROOM “CHEESE BURGERS”

Source: Adapted from How to Grill, pg. 378

Method: Direct/then indirect

Serves: 4

4 large Portobello mushrooms (8 to 10 ounces each)

2 large cloves garlic, slivered

1 ounce Romano cheese, cut into slivers

1 to 2 sprigs of fresh basil, leaves rolled into tiny “cigars,” then cut in quarters if too large

2 tablespoons pine nuts

Coarse salt

Freshly ground black pepper

4 ounces Taleggio cheese, chilled

Pesto Sauce (recipe follows)

Trim the stems off the Portobellos. Wipe clean with a damp paper towel. Using a small knife or a skewer, make a series of holes in the gill-side of the mushroom caps, about 1/2 inch apart. Insert garlic slivers in some of the holes, Romano cheese slivers in some, basil in some, and pine nuts in the remaining holes.

Spread some of the pesto sauce on the bottom of a platter or baking dish. Arrange the mushroom caps on it, and swish them around to coat the bottoms evenly. Spoon the remaining marinade over the Portobellos. Let them marinate, covered, for as little as 30 minutes or as long as 3 hours.

Set up the grill for direct grilling, keeping one zone cool, and preheat to high.

When ready to cook, remove the mushroom caps from the marinade and wipe off any excess. Arrange the mushroom caps on the hot grate, gill-side down, and grill for 3 minutes. Then turn the caps over and continue grilling until the caps are browned and very tender, 4 to 6 minutes, rotating after 2 minutes to create grill marks. Divide the Taleggio cheese among the caps (the gill-side should be up) and move to the cooler side of the grill until the cheese melts. Serve at once.

4 cloves garlic, peeled
1 bunch basil, washed, shaken and stemmed
1/2 cup pine nuts
4 ounces imported Romano cheese, cut into 1/2 inch pieces
1/4 cup lemon juice
3/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper

Puree the garlic, basil, pine nuts, and cheese in a food processor, running the machine in short bursts. With the machine running, work in the lemon juice and olive oil, and salt and pepper to taste.

-End 206-