

Puff Pastry Christmas Tree



This delicious party-perfect appetizer is adapted from a recipe I teach in my Van Gogh Cooking with the Impressionists workshop, which is in turn adapted from a 'tarte soleil' (sun tart) my friend Peta Mathias taught our tour group to make when we were last in France on one of my art and food tours.

It's easy to make and everyone likes it. All you need is two sheets of good quality puff pastry (I recommend Panneton butter puff pastry, available at Moore Wilsons in Wellington) and a filling of your choice such as pesto, tapenade, or cheese. For this recipe, we're filling our tart with a tomatade or sun-dried tomato pesto. You can also make a sweet version of this tart for dessert! Try Nutella as a filling.

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So here's how to make it:

Ingredients for the tart:

Two sheets of butter puff pastry

Filling of your choice: pesto (it's better if you make your own!), tapenade, or tomatade

Egg wash made from one egg yolk and a bit of milk

Fennel seeds, cherry tomatoes, fresh herbs for decorating

For the tomatade (tomato pesto)

100g sun-dried tomatoes

2 tbsp olive oil

50g pine nuts

handful of fresh basil

pinch of sugar

2 sml cloves garlic

1/2 tsp Espelette pepper or smoked paprika

Method: Blend it all together in the food processor till chunky- not too smooth.

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To assemble the tart:

1. Remove flaky pastry from freezer or fridge and bring to room temperature.
2. Preheat the oven to 180 degrees centigrade.
3. With the paper still attached to it, roll out the first sheet of pastry onto a baking tray. Roll it out into a rectangle about 1/8-inch (3-4mm) thick (mine was 10×15 inches (27x38cm) but it can have any dimensions as long as it's a rectangle).
4. Cut a tree shape in the dough. (see photos below) You can do it freehand or cut out a template from a piece of parchment paper. Place the leftover scraps of the dough in the fridge.
5. Spread with the paste, leaving 1cm free around the edge. (see photos below which show pesto as a filling).
6. Brush the edge with water and lay the second round of pastry on top.
7. If the pastry has got a bit soft, put the whole tray with the pastry in the freezer for 5 mins to firm it up. That way it will be much easier to cut. With scissors, cut the pastry and paper from the edge toward the center of the tree trunk.
8. Start twisting the branches. Gently pick up the first branch and twist a few times.
9. Brush with egg glaze and sprinkle lightly with fennel.
10. Bake in the oven for half an hour or till golden.

Decoration – is optional, but I think it looks pretty. I used cherry tomatoes, cut some stars out of cheese, and pipe cream cheese stars on top of the tree.

Tip: How to use up the remaining dough: I cut out some stars from the dough using a star cookie cutter and baked them with the tree. You can place one star above the tree.

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Step by step instructions



TIP: If at any point your pastry becomes sticky and hard to work with, put it in the fridge for 5-10 minutes to chill.



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