

POLENTA CROSTINI WITH WILD MUSHROOMS, GARLIC AND TALEGGIO



Parmesan-flavoured polenta baked to a crisp base is perfect for topping with all sorts of tasty items for a starter or snack. Here it's topped with an autumnal wild mushroom and melting cheese combo, but see below right for some other ideas for using up leftover roast veg.



For the crostini

600ml (2. cups) vegetable or chicken stock
150g (1 cup) polenta
50g (2/ 3 cup) Parmesan, freshly grated
25g (2 tbsp) butter
a little olive oil, for greasing
salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the topping

400g (14oz) mushrooms, a mix of wild and chestnut mushrooms
25g (2 tbsp) butter
2 tbsp olive oil
2–3 cloves of garlic, crushed
200g Taleggio, cut into 1cm/.in cubes
fresh basil, to garnish
salt and freshly ground black pepper

280–300°C (535–570°F)

Put the stock into a saucepan, set over a high heat and bring to the boil. Once boiling, slowly pour in the polenta, stirring constantly so that no lumps form. Reduce the heat to medium–low and continue to cook, stirring all the time, until it's really thick – about 5 minutes. Take a little care, as it does have a tendency to spit molten bubbles. Turn off the heat and add the Parmesan and butter, stirring until it's melted and smooth. Season generously with salt and pepper.

Lightly grease a large baking tray and scoop the polenta out on to it. Spread it out into a 1cm (.in) thick slab, using a table knife to smooth the top. You can also use your clean hands to smooth and press the top once it's cooled a little. Set aside to go cold, then wrap the tray in clingfilm and refrigerate for a few hours until really solid – overnight is fine too if you want to get ahead.

Cut the slab of chilled polenta – it will be really solid now – into 9 evenly sized rectangles. Slice each rectangle into 2 triangles and spread out over a couple of baking trays, making sure they have plenty of space around them. Drizzle over a little olive oil, and turn the triangles over a few times so they are evenly coated with oil.

Slide one tray into the hot oven and bake for 15 minutes, rotating the tray a few times and turning the crostini over with a palette knife halfway through. Repeat with the second tray and set both aside while you make the topping.

Put the mushrooms into a large heatproof frying pan and add the butter, olive oil and garlic. Season with salt and pepper and slide the pan into the oven. Allow the mushrooms to fry in the buttery juices for a few minutes, pulling out the pan and stirring a couple of times until they have softened. At this point you can set both mushrooms and polenta aside, ready for warming through just before you eat. When you are ready to eat, arrange the polenta triangles on one baking tray – they can sit pretty snugly together now. Top each with a few mushrooms and a couple of little cubes of Taleggio and slide back into the oven for 2–3 minutes to warm through and allow the cheese to melt a little.

Serve immediately, while the polenta is crisp and the cheese oozing.