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Fresh Spinach Dip with Feta and Dill

Makes 1-1/4 cups; serves 8 to 10

This emerald-colored spread is thick enough for crostini, yet light enough to serve with Baked Pita Chips and endive leaves, jicama sticks, and other fresh vegetables for dunking.

6 cups loosely packed fresh baby spinach leaves (about 5 ounces)
1 garlic clove, chopped
1/8 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup ricotta cheese
1 cup crumbled feta cheese (4 ounces)
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill or 1/2 teaspoon dried
Dash of cayenne pepper

1. Rinse the spinach in a large bowl of cold water. Drain but do not spin dry. Place the spinach with any water that still clings to the leaves in a large heavy nonreactive saucepan. Cover and cook over medium heat, turning over with tongs once or twice for even cooking, until the spinach is bright green and just wilted, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to a colander to drain. When cool enough to handle, squeeze dry with your hands.

2. In a food processor, combine the garlic and salt. Process until the garlic is finely chopped. Add the ricotta and puree until smooth, scraping down the sides of the bowl once or twice. Add the spinach, feta cheese, olive oil, lemon juice, dill, and cayenne. Pulse until the spinach is coarsely chopped and the cheese is blended.

3. Transfer to a bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 6 hours before serving.

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Sun-Dried Tomato Aioli

Makes 1-1/2 cups; serves 8 to 10

Serve this colorful garlicky mayonnaise with assorted raw vegetables or tiny roasted new potatoes. The flavor is intense – in a good way – so only a dab is needed for each serving.

20 oil-packed sun-dried tomato halves (about 1 cup), drained (about 4 ounces)
3 garlic cloves
3/4 cup mayonnaise
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1. Combine the sun-dried tomatoes and garlic cloves in a food processor or blender. Pulse until finely chopped. Add the mayonnaise, lemon juice, salt, and cayenne. Process until well blended.
2. With the machine on, gradually add the olive oil in a thin stream until completely incorporated.
3. Transfer the aioli to a bowl and serve at once, or cover and refrigerate for up to 3 days.

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Chocolate Velvet Dip

Makes 1-1/2 cups; serves 6 to 8

This lush dessert dip is remarkably rich and chocolaty. It makes an ideal embellishment for fresh strawberries, dried apricots, pretzels, butter cookies, macaroons, or cubes of pound cake.

1 cup sour cream
1/2 cup unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder
1/2 cup honey
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
Dash of salt

1. In a medium bowl, combine the sour cream, cocoa powder, honey, vanilla, and salt. Whisk until smooth.
2. Transfer to a small serving bowl and serve at once, or cover and refrigerate for up to 3 days.