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Page 1 – Chickpea Crowns

Page 2 – Gorgonzola Canapés with Walnuts

Page 3 – Gorgeous Gougères

Chickpea Crowns

Makes 24 crowns.

Hail the conquering party ruler, the party king or queen who adds these chickpea creations as adornments, thus proving their ruling capabilities. I wouldn't actually wear them on my head, naturally. They are crowns, though, due to their pointy, gem-like (with a little imagination) shapes.

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 small yellow onion, diced
4 ounces white mushrooms, sliced
One 16-ounce can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1-1/2 teaspoons chopped fresh parsley
One 17-ounce package puff pastry, thawed

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring regularly, for 4 to 5 minutes, until golden. Reduce the heat to medium, add the mushrooms, and cook for 4 to 5 minutes, stirring.
3. Add the chickpeas, pepper, salt, and parsley. Cook for 4 to 5 minutes more, stirring regularly. Using a large spoon, transfer the mixture to a food processor. Pulse 5 or 6 times, until the mixture is blended but still a bit chunky.
4. Spread the sheets of puff pastry out (no need to roll), and cut into 2-1/2-inch squares (you should have 24). Put 1 tablespoon of the chickpea filling onto each square. Pull up the squares' corners so they meet, making a small pyramid. Pinch them together.
5. Place the crowns on a baking sheet and bake for 15 to 20 minutes. They should be crisp on the outside, and will probably open a bit at the top (this is okay). Serve on a large platter.

A DRINK PAIRING: Keep the royal feeling flowing with a Princess. Fill a Collins glass three-quarters full with ice cubes. Add 1-1/2 ounces limoncello and fill to about 1/2-inch from the top with chilled club soda. Add 5 or 6 fresh raspberries, and stir well.



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Gorgonzola Canapés with Walnuts

Makes 30 canapés.

When picking out a cracker to serve as the basis for these excellent canapés, be sure to choose something with a bit of heft, that won't snap easily. You'll also want to shy away from any cracker that's been overseasoned in some way, (the classic Chicken in a Biskit won't work), because it will clash with the assertive flavors in the topping.

1-1/2 cups crumbled Gorgonzola cheese
1/2 cup chopped walnuts
30 sturdy round crackers
3/4 cup dried cranberries
1/4 cup minced fresh parsley

1. In a medium-size bowl, toss the Gorgonzola and walnuts. When tossing, be gentle, as you don't want to end up with big clumps.
2. Top each cracker with a small mound of the cheese mixture, pressing the mixture lightly onto each cracker to keep it from slipping off. Top each cracker with 3 or 4 cranberries, and sprinkle a touch of minced parsley on top of each.

A VARIATION: If desired, warm these slightly by placing them on a baking sheet and baking them for 7 minutes in a 375°F oven.



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Gorgeous Gougères

Makes 64 gougères

The name is enjoyable to say, they can be made in advance and reheated (in a 300°F oven for a couple of minutes), and they're awfully easy to whip together to begin with. Oh, and they taste darn fine. I've had many gougères, with differing cheese-butter ratios, but this version has an ideal balance of fluff and substance.

4 large eggs
1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into pieces
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup grated Gruyere cheese
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Lightly grease two baking sheets.
2. Lightly beat the eggs until the whites and yolks have mixed, but no further.
3. Put 1 cup water, the butter, and the salt in a medium-size saucepan and bring to a boil, stirring occasionally to make sure the butter melts. Once it reaches a boil, add the flour. Beat heartily with a spoon (a large wooden spoon works best) until the mixture pulls away from the pan's sides. Turn the heat down and continue cooking for 1 to 2 minutes, until the dough is partially dry. Remove from the heat. Add the beaten eggs slowly, stirring all the time. Stir in the cheeses and pepper until everything is well combined.
4. Put the dough into a large pastry bag or large zipper-top plastic bag. If using the latter, cut off one corner. Pipe the dough into 1-1/2 inch rounds on the baking sheets.
5. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes. They should be slightly crispy on the outside and slightly doughy on the inside, and a glowing gold in color.