



THE FRONT BURNER

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Open-Faced Sandwich of Spinach, Caramelized Onions, and Roasted Peppers

For 2 to 4

The silky texture of caramelized onions make this sandwich luscious. Add briefly sautéed spinach, cover with succulent thick strips of roasted peppers, and a thin pieces of white cheese like manouri or ricotta salata. It's a thing of beauty as well as well as fine, rustic are. This is a knife and fork sandwich, but if you're a fan of panini, make each sandwich with two slices of bread and press. One batch of caramelized onions will cover 3 or 4 slices of toasted bread.

Caramelized Sweet Onions (see below)

1 hefty bunch of spinach, at least a pound, stems removed, leaves well washed

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

2 meaty roasted red peppers (see page 184)

1 piece of bread per person, such as ciabatta, rye, or a whole grain levain bread

1 garlic clove, halved

Thinly sliced manouri or ricotta salata

Olive oil, to finish

Warm the caramelized onions in a pan over low heat.

In another pan, wilt the spinach in the water clinging to its leaves, then season it with salt and pepper. Slice the peppers into wide strips.

Toast the bread, then, rub one side with the garlic. Cover with the onions, followed by the spinach, the cheese, then the roasted peppers set diagonally across the top.

Season with salt and pepper, and drizzle with olive oil.

Caramelized Sweet Onions

Makes about 1-1/3 cups

Once you have a supply of these golden gems, you can use them just about everywhere. Where? With pasta, in grilled cheese sandwiches, over polenta, on top of pizza, with meats, tucked into omelets with Gruyere cheese, and so on. People who have a hard time with onions but who generally like their flavor find caramelized onion more acceptable than quickly sautéed ones. Any onion will caramelize, but sweet ones do so especially well due to their higher amount of sugar.

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2 pounds storage onions or sweet onions (5 or 6 medium)
3 tablespoons butter or olive oil, or a mixture
Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

Halve the onions, then peel and slice them. Most recipes say to slice them very thinly, but I prefer slicing them about 1/4 inch thick or even slightly thicker because they diminish a great deal as they cook.

Heat the butter in a skillet or sauté pan with deep sides over medium-high heat. Add the onions, turn them to coat with the butter, and cook, stirring them every 5 minutes or so. A lot of juices will be released at first, and as they cook away, you'll notice a change in sound: the pan will start to sizzle. This will take about 20 minutes. At this point, lower the heat and continue cooking, stirring often, until the onions are golden. The cooking will take nearly an hour in all. It's good to have something else you're doing in the kitchen so that you can turn the onions every so often. If you want them even darker, continue to cook them for another 30 minutes or so. When done, season with salt and pepper.

Cool the onions, then store them covered and refrigerated for up to a week or more.