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Tomato Tarte Tatin

Serve 6 to 8

The *tarte tatin a la tomate* at Les Philosophes in Paris is one of my all-time favorite restaurant dishes, anywhere. I was a student in Paris when I first had a bite, and I immediately knew it was a dish that I would dream about forever. Over the many years since, I've traveled to the famous Marais bistro and eaten the sweet and savory upside-down pie with parents, grandparents, siblings, boyfriends, and best friends. Back at home there have been many flops (literally) on my way to refining a version that could compare. This is the result: caramelized tomatoes that melt with basil, rosemary, and sage under a buttery crust. It makes new memories every time I serve it; I hope it will do the same for you.

4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 medium red onions, thinly sliced
3/4 teaspoon fine sea salt
3 pounds plum tomatoes
2 garlic cloves, finely sliced crosswise into rounds
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon sugar
1 cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves, chopped
1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary leaves (about 1 sprig)
1 tablespoon chopped fresh sage leaves (about 5 leaves; optional)
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
2 teaspoons unsalted butter
Pastry Dough (see below)

1. Fill a medium-size saucepan with water and bring it to a boil over high heat.
2. Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onions and 1/4 teaspoon of the salt, and cook, stirring occasionally, until they are golden brown and caramelized, 25 to 30 minutes. Set aside.
3. Set up a large ice bath next to the stovetop. Cut a shallow X in the bottom of each tomato. Working in batches, carefully drop the tomatoes into the boiling water until the skin around the X begins to peel back, 15 to 30 seconds. Pull the tomatoes out with a spider or slotted spoon and immediately submerge them in the ice bath to stop the cooking, then drain them in a colander. Use a paring knife to help peel them (most of the skin should slip off between your fingers) and remove their cores. Cut the tomatoes in half lengthwise and remove the seeds.
4. Preheat the oven to 400°F with an oven rack in the center position.

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5. Transfer the onions to a large bowl. Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil in the skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, until it becomes fragrant and just starts to soften, about 1 minute. Be careful not to let the garlic burn.

6. Add the tomatoes, 1 tablespoon of sugar, and 1/4 teaspoon of salt, and stir gently to coat the tomatoes. Sprinkle the tomato mixture with half of the basil and all of the rosemary and sage and cook undisturbed until the tomatoes have softened and stewed in their juices slightly, 2 minutes. Add the balsamic vinegar and let simmer until incorporated, 1 minute more. Remove the skillet from the heat.

7. Butter the side and bottom of a 10-inch ceramic quiche pan (or a 9-inch glass pie pan) and evenly sprinkle the remaining 1 teaspoon of sugar over the bottom. Lift the tomatoes out of their juices with a slotted spoon – making sure to pull the garlic and herbs along with them – and place them in the quiche pan (leave the juices behind, but reserve them). Evenly arrange the tomatoes, cut side up, so that they cover the bottom of the pan, filling in all gaps. Sprinkle the remaining 1/4 teaspoon of salt and the remaining basil over the tomatoes and top them evenly with the reserved caramelized onions.

8. Place a piece of parchment paper on a work surface and roll out the pastry dough on top of it, working from the center outward to form a circle about 11 inches in diameter and 1/8-inch thick. Slide your hand under the parchment to support the dough, then carefully invert the dough over the pan, allowing it to drape over the edge. Peel away the parchment. Trim any excess dough so that it is 3/4-inch wider than the edge of the pan. Tuck the dough down the sides of the pan (the inside rim), allowing it to cup the tomatoes and just kiss the bottom of the pan. Use a paring knife to cut a few narrow slits into the dough, spacing them evenly (these will act as vents).

9. Carefully transfer the pan to the center rack of the oven and place a rimmed baking sheet on the rack directly below it to catch any juices that bubble over. Bake until the crust is a deep golden brown and juices that bubble up around the edges have cooked down and caramelized, 45 to 55 minutes. Place the pan on a cooling rack and let it stand for at least 15 minutes or until cool to the touch.

10. To serve the tart, run a knife around the inside edge of the pan to release any crust that may have stuck to the side. Place the flat side of a baking sheet or a large square serving plate on top of the tart so that the sides of the pan are completely covered. While firmly holding the baking sheet in place, carefully invert the tart pan to release the tart. Let it sit for a moment, giving it time to settle before you lift off the pan. Rearrange any tomatoes that may have dislodged. Serve warm or at room temperature.

NOTE: You can cook down the tomato juices that are left in the pan over medium heat until they thicken and become jammy, 5 to 7 minutes. Spoon over the tart or serve alongside a cheese platter.

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Pastry Dough

Makes enough for one 9-inch pie crust

1-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon sugar
1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt
8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes and chilled
About 1/4 cup cold water

1. Combine the flour, sugar, and salt in a food processor fitted with the standard blade attachment and pulse briefly to incorporate. Scatter the butter over the flour mixture, pulling the pieces apart as you place them. Pulse a couple of times and then process until the butter becomes just smaller than the size of peas, 10 to 15 seconds. Add 1 tablespoon of the cold water through the top feed tube and pulse; continue pulsing while gradually adding another 3 tablespoons of cold water. Process until the dough begins to pull away from the side of the processor and just starts to create a ball. (Add another splash of cold water if the dough is not forming.)
2. Gather the dough into a ball, wrap it in plastic wrap, and flatten it slightly into a disc. Place the dough in the refrigerator to rest for at least 30 minutes and up to 2 days. If it spends more than 1 hour in the refrigerator, let it sit out briefly until it is soft enough to roll out but still firm. (You can also freeze pastry dough for up to 6 months.)