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Day 13



Tuscan "Sausage" Crostini (Vegan!)

You may be feeling guilty about all the cookies, cake, egg nog and candy canes you've been shoveling into your face so far this season. No need. You can counteract all those extras with recipes for delicious "real food" like this.

This recipe for an open-faced sandwich of sorts and is based on an appetizer we had in Tuscany during a cooking class given by local chefs. This has become a holiday tradition for us. Serve this when a sit-down meal is out of the question and everyone won't miss the big meal.

The original recipe calls for uncooked pork sausage (no they don't make anything like it in the states) and a soft Italian cheese similar to cream cheese only available in Italy. This was one recipe I pretty much had to convert because I never would be able to duplicate it here at home - so while I was at it, I made it a vegan dish. And since I wanted to make a vegan version of it for my husband "*Gerk the Vegan*", I had to substitute the meat and the cheese.

The meat component was no problem. There are plenty of great choices available in the local supermarket. I like Gimme Lean Sausage® by LightLife for this recipe. It comes in a tube just like the pork sausage.

The trouble I have when converting a recipe always comes when I need to find a substitute for cheese. I don't really care for the cheese substitutes available. In this case, I needed a melty type of cheese. I thought immediately of Croque Monsieur - the French classic. It incorporates a cheese-like topping of Béchamel sauce (white sauce) that gets toasted under a broiler, perfectly simulating ooey-gooley cheese.

You can make this into appetizer-sized nibbles for a crowd or slice your crostini larger and make it a meal. These always go the quickest of any starter I serve at parties.

And yes...these are vegan/vegetarian/lactose free/low fat/spa healthy (so we can have more dessert without the guilt!). Everyone attending your party will fight over them. I promise. I'll even be a cheeky monkey and say in advance: **"You're welcome!"**.

*One caveat: Just be sure the fake sausage you buy does not have egg whites in it (check the label).

Day 13

Tuscan Sausage Crostini

Slice up a crusty baguette loaf on a slight diagonal into 1/3" thick slices. Brush with olive oil and toast lightly in hot oven. Remove.

Place in large non-stick skillet

-2 Tablespoon Peanut oil

Crumble in:

- 1 14-ounce package Vegan Sausage (I use Gimme Lean Sausage® by Lightlife)

Break up the sausage as if making ground hamburger. Get a good dark-brown crust on the sausage bits. Drain on paper towels.

To make the sauce:

In a heavy 4 quart sauce pan(saucier pan with curved bottom corners if you have it) on low heat:

- 2 Tablespoons Nut oil or Olive Oil

- a scant 1/3 cup AP Flour

Stir together and brown up a bit. Whisk in:

- 1/2 teaspoon Better Than Bouillon® Organic Mushroom flavor

- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika

- 2 cups plain soy or plain rice milk

-Pinch Salt

- 1/8 teaspoon ground Cayenne Pepper

Whisk vigorously until thickened. Check seasoning and adjust spices/salt/pepper to taste.

Set aside to cool slightly.

Assemble your crostini:

Place your crostini on a cookie sheet. Place cooked sausage onto the crostini.

Spoon on some of the sauce, lightly just to coat.

Place the cookie sheet under the broiler, watching carefully. When browned on tops, but not burned, remove and sprinkle with:

-chopped chives or chopped parsley

Serve hot!