



Crostini with Tapenade

So important in Mediterranean cooking, anchovies are available preserved in two forms: packed in olive oil or in salt. Oil-packed anchovy fillets are widely available and need only to be rinsed in cool water and patted dry. Salt-packed anchovies, imported from Italy, must be filleted. To do this, hold each fish under running water and scrape off the fins and scales with a knife. Split the fish open lengthwise, separating it into two fillets, and lift out the backbone.

The tapenade can be transferred to a nonreactive bowl or a jar, tightly covered and refrigerated for up to 48 hours. Return to room temperature for 15 minutes before serving.

For the tapenade:

1 1/2 cups pitted mild brine-cured green olives, such as Luques or picholines, black niçoise olives or a combination

3 anchovy fillets, rinsed and patted dry

3 Tbs. capers, rinsed

1 1/2 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

3 garlic cloves, finely chopped

1 1/2 Tbs. cognac or brandy

3 Tbs. fresh lemon juice

1/2 tsp. freshly ground white pepper

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

24 thin baguette slices

Nonstick olive-oil or vegetable-oil cooking spray or olive oil

Pimiento (sweet pepper) strips for garnish (optional)



To make the tapenade, in a food processor, combine the olives, anchovies, capers, parsley, garlic, cognac, lemon juice and white pepper. Pulse once or twice to combine roughly, then add the olive oil and pulse briefly, stopping once or twice to scrape down the sides of the bowl. The texture should be chunky, rather than a smooth puree. Set aside. Preheat an oven to 350°F. Arrange the baguette slices on a baking sheet and coat them lightly with the olive oil spray, or brush lightly with olive oil. Bake until golden, 10 to 15 minutes.

Transfer the toasted baguette slices to a serving platter. Spread each one with about 1 Tbs. of the tapenade, then crisscross 2 small strips of pimiento on top. Serve warm or at room temperature. Makes 24 crostini.