

Crunchy Fig and Bleu Cheese Tarts

As any experienced chef would know, bleu cheese brings out the sweet taste of figs like no other ingredient. Thus, Mrs. Patmore would bake these delicious hors d'oeuvres that are simultaneously sweet and tart. Eaters beware, however: Nothing is as tart as the Crawley sense of humor!

Yields 4–6 Servings

For Pastry

1 sheet frozen puff pastry, thawed

For Walnut Crunch

2 tablespoons honey

2 tablespoons sugar

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

1 tablespoon heavy cream

1/4 cup toasted walnuts, chopped

For Figs

2/3 cup sugar

1 tablespoon lukewarm water

1 teaspoon kosher salt

12 fresh figs, halved lengthwise and stems removed

1/4 cup unsalted butter

1/2 cup sweet port

6 ounces Stilton blue cheese, crumbled, room temperature

Honey to taste

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Roll out puff pastry sheet on a clean, lightly floured surface. Place puff pastry sheet in a well-greased baking pan and then place another sheet pan on top of puff pastry to prevent it from rising too much.
3. Bake puff pastry in preheated oven (with sheet pan still on top) for 5–8 minutes or until beginning to turn golden. Remove and set aside.
4. To make walnut crunch: In a medium-sized skillet, stir honey, sugar, butter, cinnamon, and salt over medium heat until butter melts. Cook mixture until it boils and reaches a deep golden brown, about 3–5 minutes. Stir in cream, followed by walnuts. Cook for an additional 2 minutes, then pour out over a sheet of heavy foil. Let cool completely, then chop walnut crunch into small pieces.
5. To prepare figs: Mix sugar, water, and salt in a heavy skillet over medium heat until sugar is evenly moist, adding more water if needed. Cook mixture until sugar turns golden, stirring occasionally, about 5 minutes.

Place figs cut-side down in sugar mixture. Cook figs until they begin to release juice. Immediately add butter, swirling skillet to melt. Remove from heat and add port. Let figs marinate in port mixture for 5–10 minutes before removing figs to a plate to cool. Once again bring syrup to a boil, whisking until smooth. Cool completely.

6. Using a 2- to 3-inch pastry cutter, cut out rounds of semi-baked puff pastry. Divide walnut mixture among rounds, then top with fig halves, cut-side up.
7. Bake tartlets in preheated oven (still at 350°F) for 30 minutes or until golden brown.
Remove from oven and let cool slightly.
8. Artfully arrange cheese on top of tartlets, followed by the sweet port syrup. Drizzle with honey and serve.

Suggested Pairings

If you choose to serve this dish as a dessert rather than as an appetizer, try pairing these pastries with a delicious yet full-bodied dessert wine such as a Riesling, Moscato, or Chianti. Be careful, however, Moscato can be an especially sweet wine, and, depending on the brand, can easily overpower, rather than complement, the bleu cheese.