

# THE ART OF THE ANTIPASTO

## OUR ITALIAN TABLE





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A TAVOLA NON S'INVECCHIA

For us at Our Italian Table, entertaining friends and family at home is one of life's greatest pleasures and blessings. There is nothing more special than to have a house full of company, their voices and laughter mingling over a shared meal; worries and pressures put aside; hosts and company alike taking the time to enjoy each other's company.

The pandemic has changed us all in so many ways. For us, entertaining usually meant discussing menus and courses and getting every detail just so. But now, gone is the worry that every detail be perfect or that the house be completely in order (and looking like no one lives here) or that at least a few courses be served at the table. What remains for us is a more casual, light-hearted approach, still thoughtful yet allowing our creativity and love for a shared meal to shine. Friends are invited for an aperitivo and antipasto – a lighter, simpler approach to entertaining. We try to prepare foods almost all in advance with cooking kept to a minimum when guests arrive. Antipasto boards, of any shape or size, are filled with fruit, veggies, dips, meats, and cheeses, allowing for flexibility to accommodate those with dietary restrictions. And ah...the aperitivo – a mixed cocktail which is always fun to serve along with the requisite vino and beer.

The conversations feel lighter, the laughter plentiful, and this less formal way of entertaining keeps everyone at ease and conversation flowing.

Buon aperitivo a tutti!!

Michele and Joe





# HOSTING AN ANTIPASTO PARTY

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**05** MAKING ANTIPASTO BOARDS

ALONG WITH THE BOARDS, WE LIKE TO SERVE A FEW THINGS THAT ARE EITHER WARM OR A BIT MORE SUBSTANTIAL. BELOW ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE RECIPES:

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# KIWI KISS



Did you know that Italy is the world's second largest exporter of kiwis behind China? Ponder that as you mix together this super refreshing libation. Make extra pureed kiwi and top with something fizzy for a delicious non-alcoholic treat. Salute!



## INGREDIENTS

2 kiwis, peeled and sliced  
2 mint leaves  
1 lime  
Sugar for the rim of the glass  
3 ounces vodka  
1 ounce agave nectar  
Seltzer or club soda

## PREPARATION

Using a mini-food processor, puree the peeled kiwis and the mint leaves. (No mini food processor? No problem! You can also muddle together in the bottom of the cocktail shaker. I will be a bit chunkier but still very tasty!)

Grab your cocktail glasses. Cut the lime in half. Quarter one of the halves. Use one of the lime quarters to run along the rim of the glasses. Place the sugar on a flat plate and dip the rim of the glasses in the sugar. Set aside.

Add the pureed kiwi mixture, vodka, agave nectar, juice of ½ of the lime into a cocktail shaker. Shake to combine.

Fill the glasses with ice. Pour kiwi mixture over the ice. Top with seltzer.

Garnish with additional kiwi slices and mint leaves.

Makes 2 cocktails

# ANTIPASTO BOARDS



Antipasto boards are game changing when it comes to entertaining. It elevates yet simplifies the approach and is an incredibly fun and creative expression of the season and your fancy. Almost no prep involved – just a little planning and a little creativity on organizing the board are all that is needed to impress your guests.

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**First, figure out the game plan.** The first decision is to think about on how many boards to make. For a large gathering, separate meat and veggie boards work well with cheese sprinkled throughout. Smaller gatherings usually call for a combined board with meat and cheeses and veggies. If you are expecting vegan or gluten free guests, it is super easy to have one board to accommodate. And if you are serving a full meal, it is easy to leave off the meat entirely and serve only cheeses and veggies for a lighter touch.

**Next decision, what to use for your boards.** Large wooden boards work great. Flea markets and antique stores are a treasure trove for unique finds! Another great source is Etsy – especially, vintage boards from France – although they can be a bit pricey to ship to the US. But don't fret if you do have boards available. An assortment of platters works just as well.

**Next up, which dips?** My preference is to have a few, smaller bowls of various dips on the boards rather than one large dip – and they do not need to be a ton of work! Some favorites are:

**Roasted beet and goat cheese:** Mix one diced roasted beet into goat cheese, stir vigorously until blended (or use a food processor; although less cleanup if you do by hand); stir in a bit of honey; top with sliced figs or a drizzle of honey (I must admit that not everyone loves a hot pink dip – so use your discretion depending on the company invited!)

**Store-bought good quality hummus:** Good-quality hummus is so easy to find these days. I usually beef it up with some additional spices and definitely transfer to a nice serving bowl; top with some toasted chickpeas, a drizzle of the best quality olive oil you own, a sprinkle of paprika and some chopped parsley.

**Roasted tomatoes:** This is great all year and especially in the dead of winter when tomatoes are not fresh. Open a few cans of whole tomatoes. Drain. Drizzle some olive oil on the bottom of an 8 ½ X 11 glass baking dish. Lay out the whole tomatoes on the bottom. Sprinkle with salt, pepper, oregano, a little bit of sugar. Drizzle with more olive oil. Roast in a slow oven – about 250 degrees F – until the tomatoes are caramelized and beginning to brown on the edges. This will take a few hours, depending on the size of the tomatoes. Remove from oven and allow to cool. Chop the tomatoes and transfer to a bowl. Adjust seasonings and then put in serving bowl. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and chopped fresh herbs.

**Honey:** Nothing beats a little bowl of simple honey (especially from the OIT shop!) that can be drizzled over cheese (especially sharp pecorino), or veggies or fruit. Super simple but special touch!

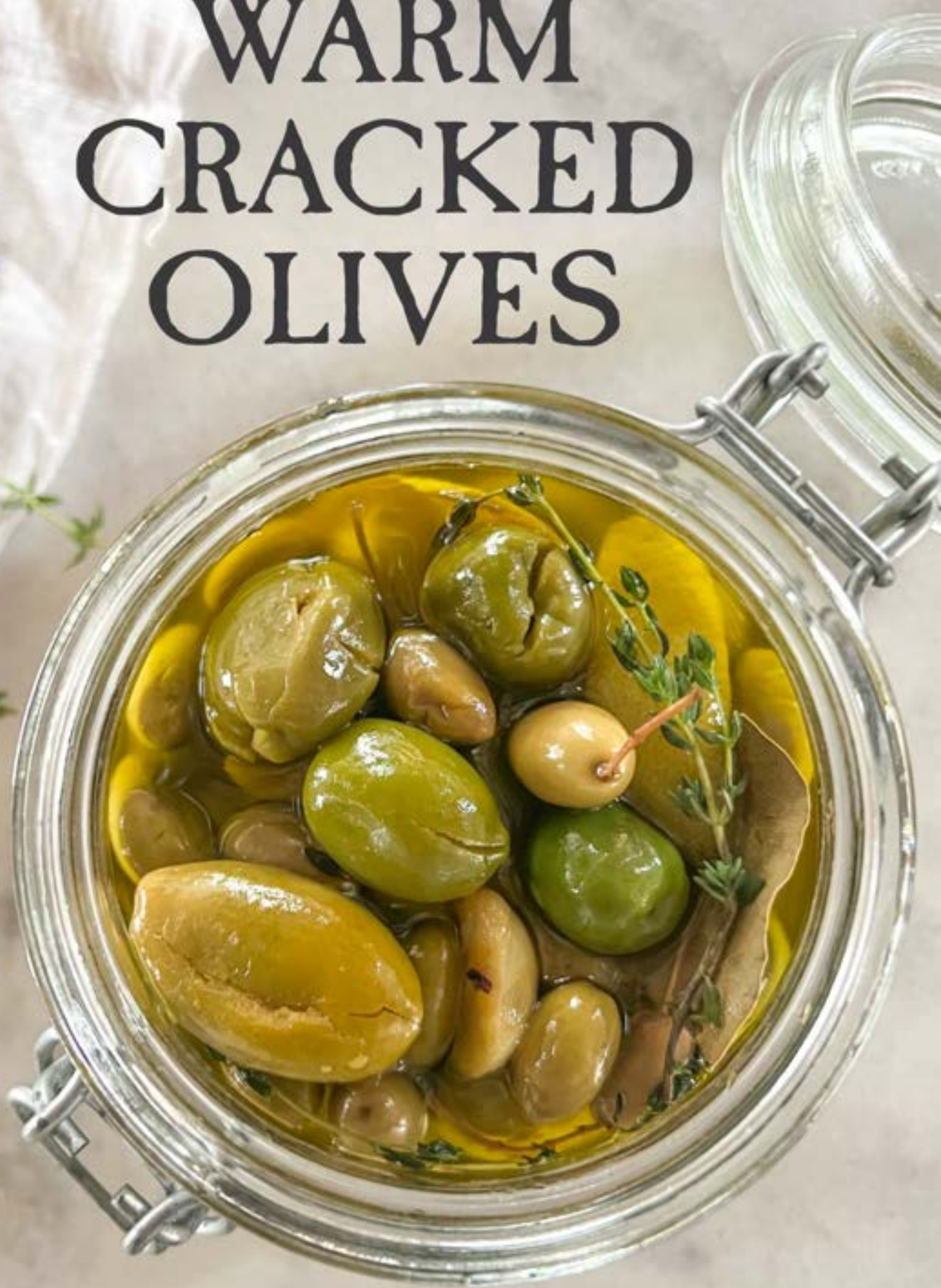
**Then plan your veggie board.** I almost always include a veggie board. My big decision is whether to include any roasted veggies. At times, this comes down to amount of prep time available. I love to mix both roasted and raw veggies and also include a small bowl of high-quality extra virgin olive oil ([also in the OIT shop!](#)) mixed with coarse salt and pepper. My fave roasted veggies are asparagus, mushrooms and carrots (especially drizzled with honey). Prep all the raw veggies the day before to save time.

**Make your list and head to the market.** Make a list as more of a guide than an exact list. Which meats are you in the mood for? Cheeses? And the really fun part – the fillers between the meats, cheese and veggies. Let the market be your guide. Crackers – select a mix of round, square and long. Fruits – select whatever is in season and looks fresh – different color grapes, kiwis, mango, figs, big fat black or blueberries. Nuts – I love pistachios or mixed nuts in a little bowl. Dried fruits – don't overlook the dried fruit aisle. Dried apricots are my favorite. Find things to sprinkle on top like microgreens or tuck fresh herbs around the platter (rosemary works great and signifies 'remembrance'). And then just let your imagination guide you while shopping. With a little patience, this can be a fun exercise.

**And finally, pour a glass of wine and create.** This is my favorite step – about an hour before the guests arrive, I start to build the board. A glass of wine helps to get my creativity flowing and then just create! Mix it up, make it messy but most importantly – have fun in the process! Just let it flow. Your company will be impressed, and you can sit back, relax and enjoy the company.



# WARM CRACKED OLIVES



Marinated olives are the perfect way to elevate your standard dish of olives for an antipasto board. These savory treats are wonderful served warm but also are great at room temperature. Pour the warm olives over some cheese, such as feta or mozzarella, to take it up a notch.

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## INGREDIENTS

Approximately 8 ounces drained unpitted green olives  
(I like a mix of Cerignola, Castelvetrano, other small green olives)  
3 cloves garlic  
1 lemon  
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
1 dried bay leaf  
½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes  
Fresh thyme sprigs

## PREPARATION

Place the olives on a cutting board and using the side of a chef's knife, lightly smash the olives. Feel free to leave some whole if desired. (I usually do.)

Lightly smash and peel the garlic cloves. Using a vegetable peeler, peel 3 long strips of lemon peel. Reserve the lemon for another use.

In a small saucepan, warm the olive oil over medium-low heat.

Once warmed, add in the bay leaf, lemon peels, red pepper flakes and 1 sprig of thyme. Stir. Add in the olives.

Cook, stirring occasionally, over medium-low heat until the garlic is starting to sizzle and turn golden. Remove from heat.

Allow to sit for about 10 minutes. If serving warm, pour olives into serving bowl and top with a few additional sprigs of thyme. If serving at room temperature, pour the olive mixture into a glass heatproof jar. Add a few sprigs of thyme. Allow to cool a bit before closing lid. Put in the refrigerator until ready to use. Remove from fridge and allow the olives to come to room temperature before serving.

Serve with crusty, toasted bread for dipping into the olive marinade!



# SPRING VEGETABLE FRITTATA WITH GOAT CHEESE

Consider this recipe a starting point for your favorite veggies. Do not hesitate to sub out any vegetable for one more to your liking (or lurking in your fridge!) We love servings frittatas as part of an antipasto as they are delicious at room temperature. This specific version is also gluten-free and vegetarian to boot – bonus!

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## INGREDIENTS

10 eggs  
2 tablespoons plain yogurt  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
1 leek  
About 6 asparagus spears  
2 cups packed baby spinach  
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
4 ounces soft goat cheese  
Fresh basil leaves, thinly sliced (optional)

## PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

In a bowl, whisk together the eggs, yogurt, salt, and a few grinds of black pepper until incorporated. Set aside.

Prep your vegetables: Remove the tough ends of the leek, leaving the white and light green parts. Slice in half lengthwise. Rinse the leek to remove any dirt and slice into very thin half-moon slices. Trim off any tough bottoms on the asparagus. Cut into 1 inch pieces. Tear off any long stems on the baby spinach.

Heat the olive oil in an 8-inch oven safe skillet (cast iron works great) over medium-low heat.

Add in the leek and sauté until tender, about 2 minutes.

Add the asparagus to the skillet and sauté until tender, 2-4 minutes.

Add in the baby spinach and sauté until the spinach is wilted. Turn off the heat.

Pour the egg mixture over the vegetables. Dollop tablespoon pieces of the goat cheese on the top of the egg mixture.

Transfer the skillet to the oven. Bake until the eggs are puffy, and the top is beginning to brown, about 20 minutes. If you would like the top a bit browner, place under the broiler for a minute or two (watch carefully!).

Remove from oven. Sprinkle with fresh basil and serve!

Do ahead: You can make the frittata ahead of time and serve at room temperature. Just as tasty!

YIELDS 6-8

# ASPARAGUS RICOTTA TART

Puff pastry tarts are a staple of my antipasto platter when company is coming. The pastry is like a blank canvas on which you can create a masterpiece from whatever veggie is in season. Here I used fresh spring asparagus nestled on a little ricotta cheese. I like to alternate the direction of the asparagus spears so when cut, every piece has both tips and ends.

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## INGREDIENTS

About  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound asparagus  
Kosher salt  
Olive oil  
Freshly ground black pepper  
1 sheet puff pastry, thawed  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup whole milk ricotta  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus extra for topping  
1 egg, separated  
Zest of  $\frac{1}{2}$  lemon  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup toasted, chopped hazelnuts (or other nut of choice)

## PREPARATION

Trim the tough ends off the asparagus, making them an equal length of approximately 8 inches. Bring a large pot or skillet of salted water to a boil over high heat. Have a large bowl of ice water at the ready. Once boiling, add the asparagus and blanch until they are bright green and crisp tender, about 2 minutes. Drain and drop the asparagus in the ice water to stop the cooking. Once cool, drain the asparagus. Pat dry and season with a little olive oil, salt and pepper. Set aside.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.

Unroll the puff pastry onto a lightly floured piece of parchment paper. (You can do this on a surface as well, but it makes it super easy to move the pastry using the parchment paper). Roll out the pastry to a 10X16 inch rectangle. Transfer the parchment to a baking sheet. Prick all over with a fork. Bake, checking occasionally, until the pastry is light golden brown and puffed, about 12 minutes. Remove from oven. Allow to cool slightly. Maintain oven temperature.

Mix together the ricotta, Parmesan, egg yolk, and zest of  $\frac{1}{2}$  lemon until smooth. Spread the ricotta mixture over the baked pastry, leaving about a 1-inch border all around. Lay the asparagus on top of the ricotta, alternating directions. Mix the egg white with about a splash of water. Brush the exposed pastry with the egg wash. Drizzle the entire tart with a little extra virgin olive oil. Top with a generous amount of pepper and Parmesan; sprinkle with the toasted nuts.

Return the pastry to the oven. Bake until the asparagus is tender, and the cheeses are melted, 15-20 minutes. Remove from oven and sprinkle with more Parmesan.

YIELDS 6-8 appetizer portions

# OVEN-ROASTED TOMATOES WITH BURRATA



This delicious mess of roasted tomatoes and creamy burrata is one of our favorites for serving when company calls and a perfect way to use tomatoes when not at the peak of tomato season. Roasting the tomatoes concentrates their flavor and takes the usual store-bought version to a new level. Serve with plenty of toasted bread for sopping up the delicious juices. (These tomatoes are also wonderful served over pasta!)

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## INGREDIENTS

3 cloves garlic  
2 pints cherry tomatoes  
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
Fresh thyme sprigs  
Kosher salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
4 ounces burrata  
Extra-virgin olive oil

## PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.

Using a chef's knife, smash and peel the garlic cloves.

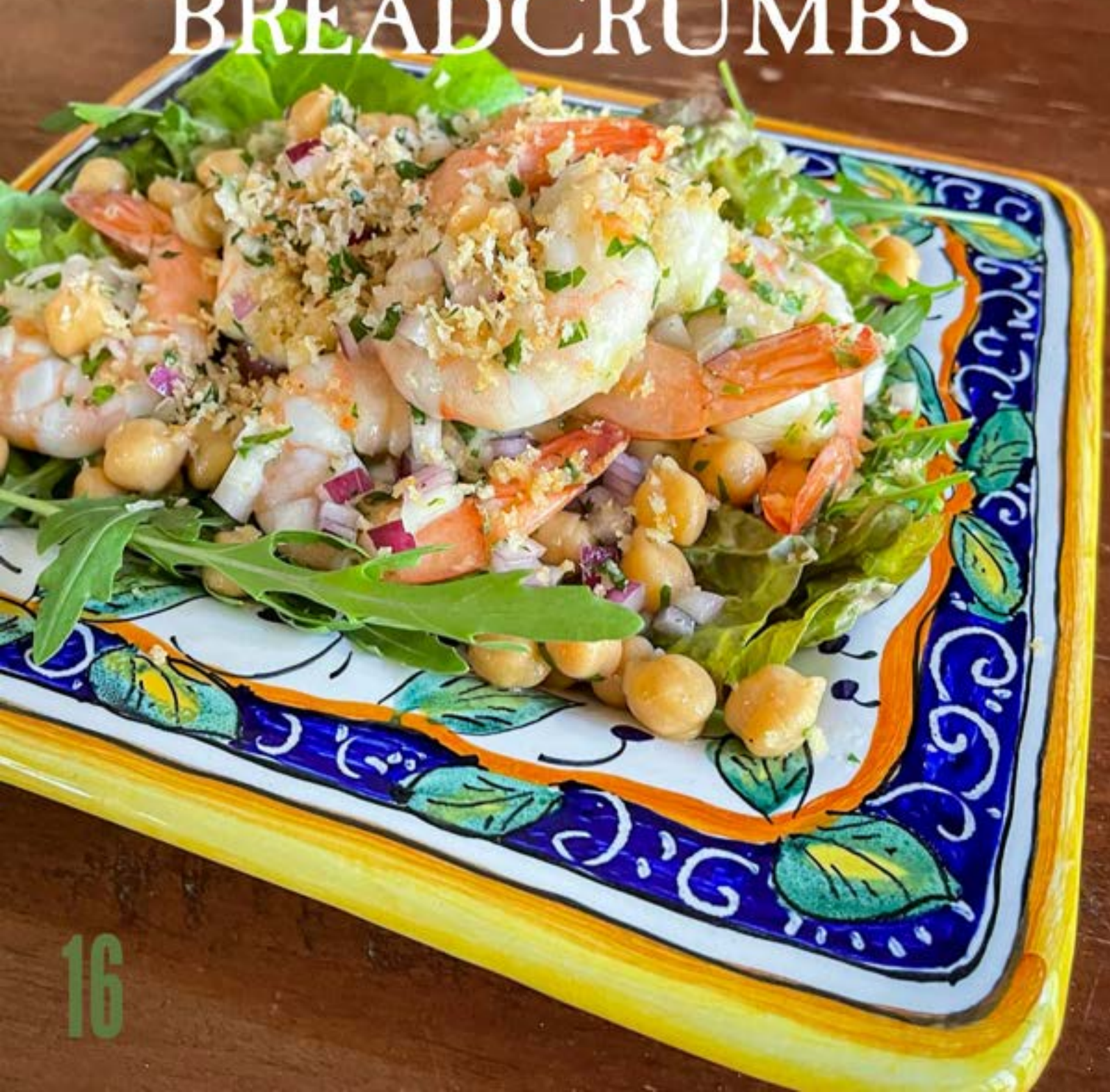
In a small baking dish, toss the tomatoes with the garlic, olive oil and a few sprigs of fresh thyme. Season with ½ teaspoon kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

Roast until the tomatoes are beginning to burst and the edges are lightly browned, 30-40 minutes. Remove from oven.

Tear the burrata into pieces on your serving platter. Pour the warmed tomatoes over the burrata. Drizzle with a little more extra-virgin olive oil and a few more sprigs of thyme. Serve!

Do ahead: You can roast the tomatoes the day prior. Gently reheat the tomatoes before pouring over the burrata.

# CHICKPEA AND SHRIMP SALAD WITH ANCHOVY BREADCRUMBS



This chickpea and shrimp salad is the perfect make ahead dish for a spring lunch or as part of an antipasto platter. You can toss the chickpea and shrimp salad together the day before and then simply serve over your favorite greens. The lemony vinaigrette adds the perfect compliment to the creaminess of the chickpea and briny flavor of the shrimp. Please don't skip the anchovy breadcrumbs because they provide the perfect crunch that finishes the salad nicely.

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## INGREDIENTS

### **For the chickpeas:**

- 2 (15-oz cans) chickpeas drained or to cook dried beans (quick-cook method from Cook's Illustrated)
- 1 cup (about 9 oz.) dried chickpeas
- 1 dried bay leaf
- 1 clove garlic, smashed
- ½ onion, outer skin removed
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ⅛ teaspoon baking soda

### **For the vinaigrette:**

- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Juice of 1 lemon
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

### **For the anchovy breadcrumbs:**

- 2 cups panko breadcrumbs
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 4 oil-packed anchovy fillets
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped

- Approx. 12 tail-on cooked shrimp
- ½ red onion, diced
- Fresh parsley, chopped
- 2–4 cups salad greens of your choice

YIELDS 4-6 appetizer portions

# PREPARATION

## **Make the chickpeas if using dried beans:**

In a medium saucepot, add 3 cups water and the dried chickpeas, bay leaf, garlic, onion, salt, and baking soda.

Cover and bring to a boil. Stir and reduce heat to low. Cook for 1 to 1 ½ hours until tender. Check and stir occasionally. Add more water if needed to cover the beans.

Remove from heat. Let cool and store in a container in the fridge. You will need about 2-3 cups for this recipe. Use the remaining beans on salads, in soups or as a snack.

## **Make the vinaigrette:**

Combine all the ingredients for the vinaigrette in a bowl. Mix vigorously with a kitchen whisk to incorporate. Taste and add salt and pepper to your liking.

## **Make the anchovy breadcrumbs:**

In a skillet large enough to spread the breadcrumbs in a thin layer, add the breadcrumbs. Place over medium-low heat and toast the breadcrumbs by swirling them with a wooden spoon. Keep a close watch so that they do not burn. When nicely toasted, remove to a bowl.

In the same skillet, add 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium-low heat. When warm, add the garlic and cook until slight golden, about 30 seconds.

Add in the anchovies and breakup with a wooden spoon. Stir until the anchovies are mostly dissolved.

Add the breadcrumbs back in and stir to incorporate. If a bit dry, add a few drops of olive oil. Remove to a bowl.

When cooled, stir in the parsley. Taste and adjust salt and pepper if needed.

## **Assemble the salad:**

In a bowl, combine 2 cups drained chickpeas, shrimp, red onion, and 1 tablespoon parsley.

Stir in about 3 tablespoons of the vinaigrette. You want the salad a bit on the wet side as it will also dress the greens on which you plate them. Add salt and pepper to taste.

On a serving platter, arrange the salad greens. Spoon over the shrimp and chickpea mixture. Drizzle with more of the dressing. (Reserve any remaining dressing for another use.) Top with the anchovy breadcrumbs and serve!

Do ahead: If you can, make the chickpea and shrimp mixture a day in advance to allow the flavors to mingle!

A top-down view of a wooden surface covered with an assortment of chocolate and fruit. The items include whole strawberries, some dipped in chocolate; raspberries; blackberries; red currants; sliced figs; and various chocolate pieces like bars, truffles, and small squares. The text 'CHOCOLATE DESSERT BOARD' is centered in white serif font.

# CHOCOLATE DESSERT BOARD

Appetizer boards are all the rage right now but why not extend that idea to desserts and even better, chocolate? Everyone can take a nibble of their favorite dessert without having to commit to a big piece of dessert.

They are simple to make – you could purchase absolutely everything store-bought, or you could mix it up with a few homemade items, such as dark chocolate dipped strawberries as I did here.

Use the list below as a guide but honestly, go to your market's candy aisle (don't overlook the organic and gluten-free candy sections) and think about shapes and flavors. Mix chocolate squares with rectangles. Pick a few unusual chocolate bars as there are so many great flavors now. Look for candies in the same color family. Add in some fresh fruit that can easily be eaten – big fat blackberries, raspberries, grapes. So fun and so game-changing for dessert!



## INGREDIENTS

### **For the dark chocolate dipped strawberries:**

1-pint strawberries, stems on, washed and dried  
6 ounces dark chocolate bars  
Coarse sea salt (optional)

### **For the chocolate dessert board:**

Chocolate bars – choose a mixture of dark and light,  
flavored and plain, square and rectangular  
Chocolate covered pretzels  
Chocolate covered nuts  
Chocolate candies such as M&Ms  
Fresh fruit and berries – figs, blackberries, raspberries  
Coconut date balls

**Make the strawberries:** Place a piece of parchment paper on a baking tray and set a baking rack over the paper.

Break up the chocolate bars into the top of a double boiler. Add a few inches of water to the bottom of the double boiler and bring to a simmer over medium low heat. Melt the chocolate, stirring occasionally, until smooth. Remove from heat. Alternatively, you can melt the chocolate in a heat-proof glass bowl in the microwave in 30-second intervals. Stir after each interval.

Holding the strawberry by the stem, dip into the melted chocolate. Turn to coat. Allow any excess chocolate to fall back into the bowl. Set the strawberry on the rack. Sprinkle with sea salt, if using.

Repeat with the rest of the strawberries. Allow the chocolate to set either at room temperature or place in the fridge. Chocolate should be set in about 30 minutes.

**To assemble your board:** First place any of the larger items on the board such as the strawberries in little groupings. Then layer in the various sizes of chocolate bars, broken into various shapes and lengths. Layer in the fruit and other candies. And lastly, fill in gaps and spaces with smaller candies and fruits. **That's it! Enjoy!**



# OUR ITALIAN TABLE

*a casa*



Ciao and welcome to Our Italian Table! My name is Michele and together with my brother, Joe, grew up as children of second-generation Italian-Americans in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, a small town on the Delaware River that saw a large influx of Italian immigrants in the early 20th century. Our love of cooking started with helping our mother prepare her homemade Italian dishes that she was forever sharing with our neighborhood and family. Homemade gnocchi, ravioli, passatelli were staples in our house and luckily she passed on her cooking skills to us.

Please join us at our table! You can find us at [ouritaliantable.com](https://ouritaliantable.com) and on Instagram as [@OurItalianTable](https://www.instagram.com/OurItalianTable) - we look forward to welcoming you.

Wishing you many happy meals with family and friends...buon appetito.

