



Crostini with Figs and Honey

*Submitted by Ralph Copeland. Ralph is from Crane, Texas.
He is Sandy's cousin and frequent travel partner.*

Ingredients:

- Loaf or baguette of French or Italian bread
- 5 teaspoons Sandy Oaks Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled
- Six ounces mild or “sweet” Gorgonzola cheese
- Eight dried figs, cut in half; or 16 dried figs, depending upon their size and the size of the croutons. If in season, use fresh figs.
- 1-1/2 tablespoons honey
- 1/2 tablespoon Herbs de Province
- 2 teaspoons mignonette pepper, with allspice
- 8 sprigs of fresh opal basil, or fresh mint.



Preparation:

Cut eight one inch thick croutons, on the bias, from the loaf or baguette; it's best if the bread is slightly stale. Toast each crouton on one side only. Place two of the croutons, toasted side up, on each dessert dish or bread plate.

Brush each crouton generously with a fragrant olive oil (a garlic-infused oil is especially suitable). Rub each of the toasted oil-coated croutons vigorously with the cut end of a garlic clove halved cross ways.

Parboil the figs in a small pan of boiling water briefly-perhaps 30 seconds, more or less, depending on the texture of the figs. Dunk the figs in ice water briefly to stop the cooking, and drain on paper towels. (Alternately plump the figs in ice water for a couple of hours.) Pinch off the stems. Place two figs-or two fig halves-side by side on the croutons, which-oiled and garlicked-are now crostinis.

Sprinkle each crostini with a generous tablespoon of mild, or “sweet” Gorgonzola cheese, crumbled into pea-sized pieces. (Or try a good chevre cheese, or even Roquefort.) Drizzle each crostini, and the plate surrounding it, with a teaspoon of honey, preferably a strong dark honey like tupelo or buckwheat, though orange-blossom or wild flower honey “is also nice and will suffice.”

Drizzle the edge of each plate with 1/4 tsp of plain olive oil.

Sprinkle a pinch of Herbs de Province (includes savory, rosemary, and lavender, among other things) on each crostini, and grind a little mignonette pepper (50/50 white and black peppercorns, plus a pinch of coriander seeds) mixed with a few whole allspice berries, over each plate. (A few pink peppercorns in your mill made for eye appeal.)

Garnish the place with a couple of sprigs of fresh opal basil if it's available; fresh mint sprigs work well, too.

Fresh figs, “just as they are” or halved, work well when you can find them. Some people “gild the lily” with a light sprinkling of powdered sugar, pressed through a fine sieve. (Herbs de Province and mignonette pepper by mail from Penzey's Spices, Milwaukee, WI.; www.penzeys.com)

Serving Size: 4