

butternut squash & ricotta bruschettas

serves 6

I love the way recipes evolve; I believe this one started with Jean-Georges Vongerichten and I also saw a version from Mark Bittman. Not only do I like the savory-sweet thing of butternut squash and maple syrup, but I also love the creamy ricotta on the crisp toast.

1 pound butternut squash, peeled and ½- to ¾-inch-diced
Good olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1/8 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
3 cups sliced yellow onions (2 onions)
2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
2 tablespoons pure Grade A maple syrup
Apple cider or apple juice (optional)
6 (½-inch-thick) slices rustic country bread, toasted (see note)
1½ cups fresh ricotta, homemade (recipe follows) or store-bought

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

Place the squash, 2½ tablespoons olive oil, 1 teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon black pepper, and the red pepper flakes on a sheet pan, toss, and spread out in one layer. Roast for 25 to 35 minutes, until very tender and starting to brown on the edges, tossing once with a metal spatula during roasting. Set aside.

Meanwhile, heat the butter and 2 tablespoons olive oil in a medium (10-inch) sauté pan. Add the onions and cook over medium to medium-low heat for 12 to 15 minutes, tossing occasionally, until golden brown. Add the vinegar and maple syrup and simmer over medium heat for 4 to 6 minutes, until the liquid is reduced. When the squash is tender, add it to the sauté pan with the onions and mash it lightly with a dinner fork. If the mixture is a little dry, add a few tablespoons of apple cider to moisten. Taste for seasonings and reheat over low heat, if necessary.

To assemble the bruschettas, spread a thick layer of ricotta on each toast and spoon the squash mixture on top. Sprinkle with salt and serve warm.

Note: *To toast the bread, brush with olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and toast in a 350-degree oven for 12 to 15 minutes.*

make ahead: *Prepare the butternut squash mixture and refrigerate for up to 2 days. Reheat adding a few tablespoons of apple cider. Assemble the bruschettas just before serving.*

homemade ricotta

makes about 2 cups

4 cups whole milk
2 cups heavy cream
1 teaspoon kosher salt
3 tablespoons good white wine vinegar

Set a fine-mesh sieve over a deep bowl. Dampen 2 layers of cheesecloth with water and line the sieve with the cheesecloth.

Pour the milk and cream into a stainless-steel saucepan. Stir in the salt and bring to a rolling boil over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Turn off the heat and stir in the vinegar. Allow the mixture to stand for one minute until it curdles. It will separate into a thick part (the curds) and a milky part (the whey).

Pour the mixture into the cheesecloth-lined sieve and allow it to drain at room temperature for 20 to 25 minutes, occasionally discarding the liquid that accumulates in the bowl. The longer you let the mixture drain, the thicker the ricotta will be. Transfer the ricotta to a bowl, discarding the cheesecloth and any remaining whey. Use immediately or cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate. The ricotta will keep refrigerated for 4 to 5 days.

