

Mini sausage rolls

Makes about 16, takes 20 minutes plus oven time

So I DID feel guilty about using shop bought pastry, and these would probably be even more delicious with a home made short crust. But I felt like puff, and I still haven't tackled that behemoth with my own hands. Plus the quality of the ready made stuff in french supermarkets is FINE. The simple sausage mixture is quick and easy to put together and brings all the homemade you need to the table.

- * *Onion - 1 small, peeled and diced*
- * *Butter - a knob*
- * *Sage - a few leaves, chopped*
- * *Fennel seeds - 1 tsp, ground*
- * *Pork mince - 250g*
- * *Apple - 1 small, cored and diced*
- * *Ready rolled puff pastry - a sheet (preferably rectangular)*
- * *Egg - 1, beaten*

1 large baking tray, lined with greased baking paper

Preheat the oven to 190 degrees C.

In a small frying pan, fry the onion in a little butter until soft. Add the sage and fennel seeds during the cooking.

Meanwhile, mix the pork, apple and plenty of salt and pepper in a large bowl. Once the onion is soft, add it to the meat and mix well.

Lay your pastry out on a cleaned, floured surface and cut off two 12cm by 30cm rectangles. If all you can find is a round pastry case, like me, then you can cobble together enough rectangular pieces by using a long central strip and two slightly shorter side strips on either side. The width is what matters, rather than the length in any case, as you'll be cutting them into individual rolls.

Divide the sausage mixture evenly between the two strips (or more, if you have them). You want the meat running all the way down a long edge of each pastry rectangle in a long sausage shape, about 1cm from the edge. Dab a little beaten egg all the way down the opposite long edge of each pastry strip - this will act as your glue.

Carefully roll the pastry around the sausage, starting from the side where the meat is, and lightly pressing down to seal the closing edge with the egg.

Leave the egg to dry for a couple of minutes, then cut the rolls into individual sized portions using a sharp knife. Don't worry if they look messy at this stage, they will even out in the oven. Place the sausage rolls on a prepared baking tray, stuffing any stray bits of meat back inside the rolls. Cut a little 'v' shape on the top of each one to make it look pretty, and lightly brush the top with some more beaten egg.

Bake in the oven for 20 minutes, until the pastry is golden brown. Carefully remove the sausage rolls from the baking paper with a spatula. Serve immediately, or make ahead of time (up to a few days) and reheat in a hot oven for five minutes.

Mini broccoli and stilton quiches

Makes 4 mini quiches (serves 8 as a canapé), takes about 40 minutes, plus oven time.

For the pastry

- * *Ground almonds - 1.5 cups*
- * *Butter - 50g, cold and cut into chunks*
- * *Salt - a pinch*
- * *Eggs - 1*

For the filling

- * *Broccoli - a couple of handfuls of florets*
- * *Olive oil - a drizzle*
- * *Eggs - 4*
- * *Double cream - 80ml*

* *Stilton - 50g*

4 individual, deep tart tins

Preheat the oven to 210 degrees C.

Start by making the pastry. In a mixer, pulse the butter, almonds and salt until you have an even crumb. Add one egg and mix until combined.

Divide the mixture evenly between the tart cases. Using the tips of your fingers, gently press into uniform pastry cases, going right up the side of each tin. Place in the fridge to chill for 15 minutes.

Cut the broccoli florets into quarters to make delicate bite sized pieces. Lay them out on a baking tray, drizzle with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Bake in the oven for 10 minutes, until the broccoli is starting to turn golden.

Reduce the oven temperature to 190 degrees C and bake the pastry cases for 15 minutes, until turning golden brown.

Meanwhile beat the four remaining eggs with the cream in a measuring jug. Season with salt and pepper.

When the pastry cases are cooked, remove them from the oven. Divide the broccoli between the tarts and crumble some Stilton into each one. Carefully pour the egg mixture into each tart. Bake in the oven for another 15 minutes, until just firm.

Leave to cool slightly before turning out of the tins. Serve hot or warm.

Four open-face finger sandwich ideas - Salmon and watercress // Ham, roasted beetroot and mustard // Egg mayonnaise // Cheese and cucumber

So nostalgic! And surprisingly delicious when you use top quality, fresh products. I went for open-faced sandwiches to up the filling to bread ratio. A couple of notes - I used a brown seeded loaf and some brioche for variety. A lovely sourdough would also be tasty - or anything really, as long as it's ultra fresh. Cut each sandwich in half or quarters to make them easier to nibble.

I roasted the beetroot myself for the ham sandwiches, which gives a sweeter and less watery result. If you can get hold of raw beets, cook them this way - it just needs doing in advance. Otherwise ready cooked beetroot without vinegar would be fine.

I WOULD have made my own mayonnaise. Probably. But raw eggs are a no-no at the moment. However, the guilty pleasure of shop bought mayo with added Dijon mustard makes this into a more nostalgic, less gourmet sandwich. Still exceedingly pleasing.

On the same theme, you could of course also go for cream cheese instead of something hard with the cucumber. I also might have added some pickle or chutney if I'd had any.

For the salmon and watercress

* *Brown seeded bread - 6 slices*

* *Butter - to spread*

* *Smoked salmon - 200g*

* *Crème fraiche - a few tbsp*

* *Watercress - a few leaves*

* *Lemon - a couple of squeezes*

Butter each slice of bread. Cut the salmon slices to fit the bread and lay a couple of slices on each piece. Add a dollop of crème fraiche, a few leaves of watercress, a good squeeze of lemon and some black pepper.

For the ham and roasted beet

* *Raw beetroot - 1*

* *Brown seeded bread - 6 slices*

* *Dijon mustard - a couple of tsp*

* *Butter - to spread*

* *Ham - 150g*

Preheat the oven to 220 degrees C.

Scrub the beetroot clean and cut it in half. Wrap each half in tin foil and place in the oven for an hour. Carefully unwrap the foil and check the beet is tender by inserting a sharp knife into the centre. Leave to cool.

Butter each slice of bread and add a dollop of mustard. Finely slice the beetroot. Lay a couple of slices of beet and some ham on each piece of bread.

For the egg mayonnaise

- * Eggs - 4
- * Mustard mayonnaise - 2 tbsp
- * Brioche - 6 slices
- * Butter - to spread

Boil the eggs for 9 minutes, then run them under cold water. Peel the eggs and roughly chop them. Mix the egg in a bowl with the mayo and season well with salt and pepper. Butter each slice of bread then spread the egg mayonnaise thickly onto each slice.

For the cheese and cucumber

- * Brioche - 6 slices
- * Butter - to spread
- * Hard cheese (cheddar/comté) - 150g
- * Cucumber - 1/3

Butter each slice of bread. Thinly slice the cheese and cucumber. Lay a couple of slices of cheese on each piece of bread and then top with some slices of cucumber.

Mama's mama's mama's date, ginger and walnut loaf with mascarpone icing

Makes a large loaf, takes 15 minutes plus oven time

If you can't get hold of date syrup, you could use regular sugar, and icing sugar with the mascarpone. Best enjoyed toasted, with a fresh lick of icing. Or a little butter for a more modest tea time/elevensies snack.

For the loaf

- * Plain flour - 340g
- * Baking powder - 4 heaped tsp
- * Salt - 1 tsp
- * Ground ginger - 1 tbsp
- * Butter - 56g, cut into small pieces
- * Pitted dates - 340g, chopped
- * Water - 125ml
- * Walnuts - 110g, chopped
- * Date syrup - 50g
- * Milk - 3 tbsp
- * Eggs - 2, beaten

For the mascarpone and date icing

- * Mascarpone - 250g
- * Date syrup - 3 tbsp
- * Rum - 1 tbsp

1 large loaf tin, greased and floured

Preheat the oven to 180 degrees C.

In a large mixing bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, ginger and salt.

Use your fingers to incorporate the butter evenly into the flour.

In a small pan, simmer the dates with the water for a few minutes.

Add the walnuts and date syrup to the flour and mix well. Then add the dates along with the liquid. Mix to combine. Finally mix in the milk and the eggs.

Spoon the mixture into the loaf tin and bake for 45 minutes. Check it's cooked by inserting a knife into the centre of the cake - it should come out clean. Let cool a little before turning out the cake.

To make the icing, whisk the mascarpone in a bowl until light and fluffy. Briefly whisk in the date syrup and rum to combine. The icing will separate when stored in the fridge - just give it a good stir before serving.

Serve the bread toasted with a layer of icing or just some butter spread over the top.