

Laurie's Goat Cheese, Pesto, and Fig Cheesecake

SERVES: 8

PREP: 15 MINUTES

CHILL: 1 HOUR, OR OVERNIGHT

Laurie Bullington of Birmingham, Alabama, has an appetizer that she says “always gets devoured.” It is sort of a torte, has been called a terrine, and has the consistency of cheesecake so Laurie has settled on naming it cheesecake. It is especially welcome at Christmas, when life gets hectic, because Laurie can make it ahead of time and have it ready to go in the fridge. Laurie varies the recipe by the season and what she has on hand. For example, instead of the fig preserves she has used peach preserves or mango chutney. To keep things interesting she scours craft fairs and farmers’ markets for homemade preserves, and for special occasions she often tops the cheesecake with toasted spicy pecans.

If you want just a sweet cheesecake, don’t include the pesto. If you want a savory one, don’t include the fig preserves. But if you want something really special, definitely include both.

*Vegetable oil spray,
for misting the loaf pan*

*4 ounces goat cheese,
at room temperature*

*4 ounces cream cheese,
at room temperature*

½ cup basil pesto (see Note)

½ cup fig preserves

*Sweet and Spicy Pecans
(optional; recipe follows),
chopped*

*Plain unsalted crackers,
such as Carr's water crackers,
for serving*

- ① Lightly mist a 5½-by-3-inch (mini) loaf pan with vegetable oil spray, line it with waxed or parchment paper, and set it aside.
- ② Place the goat cheese and cream cheese in a medium-size bowl and blend with an electric mixer on low speed until creamy, about 30 seconds. Using a rubber spatula, lightly press the cheese mixture into the prepared loaf pan. Spoon the pesto over the cheese mixture, spreading it out evenly. Cover the pan with plastic wrap and refrigerate the cheesecake until serving time, at least 1 hour.
- ③ Just before serving, remove the cheesecake from the fridge. Remove the plastic wrap and invert the cheesecake onto a serving plate. Spoon the preserves over

the top. Top the cheesecake with the Sweet and Spicy Pecans, if desired, and serve with unsalted crackers.

SAVE THE DAY NOTE

Use a 3½-ounce jar of prepared pesto found in the supermarket or, better yet, make your own. See the recipe for My Easy Pesto on the facing page.



Do Ahead

After you top the cheesecake with pesto, you can refrigerate it for 3 days before unmolding and topping it with the preserves. If you are garnishing the cheesecake with the pecans, you can prepare these 3 days ahead and keep them in a sealed plastic bag until it's time to garnish.



★ RAZZLE-DAZZLE

Laurie likes to serve this with chutney for really festive, fun occasions. If she doesn't have mango or peach chutney, she'll stir hot sauce into store-bought peach preserves to kick it up a bit. And, if you really want to run with the salty-sweet-spicy flavor combo, crumble 6 slices of crisp, cooked bacon on top instead of topping the cheesecake with pecans.

Sweet and Spicy Pecans

MAKES: 1 CUP
COOK: 5 MINUTES
COOL: 20 MINUTES

Spicy pecans are an indispensable ingredient in the busy kitchen. Made ahead, they are at the ready for tossing onto green salads, or dressing up easy appetizers such as the “cheesecake.” Adjust the pecan flavorings to your liking, adding the amount of sugar and heat that suits you.

1 tablespoon salted butter

2 tablespoons light brown sugar

1 teaspoon hot sauce, such as Tabasco

1 cup pecan halves

- ① Place a large cast-iron skillet over medium heat. Add the butter, brown sugar, and hot sauce and cook, stirring, until the butter melts. Remove the skillet from the heat. Add the pecan halves and stir to coat the pecans with the butter mixture.
- ② Place the skillet over low heat and cook the pecans, stirring, until they are lightly toasted, about 1 minute (be careful not to let the sugar burn).
- ③ Remove the skillet from the heat and let the pecans cool completely, about 20 minutes, before using or storing.

My Easy Pesto

MAKES: ABOUT 1 CUP
PREP: 10 MINUTES

To keep pesto green, mix fresh basil and fresh parsley. The basil gives the pesto flavor and the parsley keeps it green.

1 clove garlic, peeled

½ cup packed fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves

½ cup packed fresh basil leaves

2 tablespoons pine nuts

¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

Freshly ground black pepper

½ cup olive oil

- ① With the food processor motor running, drop the garlic clove down the feed tube and process until minced, about 5 seconds. Turn off the machine, add the parsley and basil leaves to the processor, and pulse until well chopped, 7 to 8 times. Add the pine nuts and Parmesan cheese and season with pepper to taste. Pulse 5 to 6 times.
- ② With the motor running, pour the olive oil into the feed tube and let the pesto process until it thickens and comes together. Turn off the machine, scrape the pesto into a glass bowl with a lid, and store in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.