

Pass the plate with these fabulously festive holiday crostini



Festive Holiday Crostini

Photos Susie Iventosch

By Susie Iventosch

'Tis the season for holiday gatherings and here are a few festive crostini ideas to pass around your crowd! I just love the colors in these little appetizers and the flavors are so good, but each very different. Roasted cherry tomatoes pair beautifully with turkey pepperoni, Kalamata olives and burrata, while goat cheese makes the perfect base for a

topping of pomegranate seeds, dried cranberries and roasted salted pistachios. Top each with micro greens or small basil leaves for a little extra color. If you are planning Hanukkah festivities, then swap the cranberries and pomegranates seeds out for blackberries, dried blueberries and blanched almonds or macadamia nuts for the perfect blue and white appetizer.

These are so easy to make and you can slice the baguette

ahead of time and store it in an airtight container for several days. Then, when you're ready to roll, simply brush the baguette slices with a little olive oil and sea salt and bake in a low oven for about 5-7 minutes to get them slightly toasty. Then spread with your cheese of choice and start decorating away.

I like to roast or grill the cherry tomatoes so you get a little bit of charred color before adding them to the crostini, and the tomato juices are so good on top, but if you're in a hurry, just use raw tomatoes.

This step can also be done ahead to save time when you want to serve them.

You can swap out the dried fruit on the goat cheese variety with any dried fruit you like. Apricots or dried cherries would also be delicious and you can pick any nut you like to go with this crostini that

pairs well with the dried fruit you selected. This recipe makes about 30 crostini.



INGREDIENTS

Crostini

1 plain baguette, sliced into 1/4-inch slices (about 30 per baguette)
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1/4 teaspoon salt

Roasted Tomato, Kalamata & Burrata

8 oz. Burrata cheese or goat cheese
50-60 cherry tomatoes, roasted
1-2 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 teaspoon lemon pepper
30 Kalamata olives, cut into quarters
30 slices of turkey pepperoni (can use ham, salami, or any kind of charcuterie that you love best)
Small basil leaves or micro-greens

Goat Cheese, Fruit & Nuts

8 oz. goat cheese, softened to room temperature
1 cup dried cranberries (can use cherries, blueberries, apricots, etc.)
1 cup pomegranate seeds
1 cup roasted and salted pistachios (can use whatever nut you love best)
Small basil leaves or micro-greens for garnish

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 400 F. Toss cherry tomatoes with olive oil and lemon pepper. Place the tomato mixture in an oiled or sprayed baking dish and roast for approximately 15 minutes, or until the tops of the tomatoes begin to turn slightly brown and the tomatoes become soft. Remove from oven and reduce oven temperature to 300 F.

Line a baking sheet parchment paper.

Slice baguette into 1/4-inch (or so) slices and lay out on the prepared baking sheet. In a small bowl, mix olive oil with salt and pepper if you like, or lemon pepper, and lightly brush just the tops of the baguette slices. Bake for 5-7 minutes, or just until the bread becomes slightly toasted. Remove from oven.

Spread cheese over the top of each baguette slice and arrange the tomatoes, pepperoni and olives on top, (or the fruit and nuts). Garnish with the greens of your choice.

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Longtime Lafayette resident turns 100



Photo Kathryn Ishizu

Birthday celebration at a Lamorinda Village Coffee and Conversation meeting

Submitted by Betty La Porte

Lafayette's Joseph M. Fox III celebrated his 100th birthday on Nov. 20. And he did it as he does just about everything – with vigor and enthusiasm. Talk to people who know Joe, and they all say the same thing: he has been remarkable at just about any age, and the 100-year-old Joe did it again with the elegant slideshow that was presented to an admiring group of partygoers. One tech-savvy 15-year-old was overheard saying:

"That's really awesome! I can't even do that." Ah, well. That's Joe, with the skills and know-how that's the envy of everyone. Who knew, at 100 years, that Joe would be a faithful regular at Lamorinda Village's chair yoga? And who could imagine someone at 100 years old swimming every day? And how many of us know anyone who has written three books that have all been published after the age of retirement?

Joe and his wife, Betty Larkin Fox, moved their family of six children (two

daughters and four sons) to Lafayette in 1966 from the East Coast when Joe became employed by Bechtel as a chemical engineer. Betty was active in the local real estate market. Together they kept the home fires burning, participated in the kid's school activities, made lasting friendships in the community, and traveled when there was time.

In 1992, when all the kids had their college degrees, Betty died after a short illness. Joe carried on, keeping the family home a place where everyone could gather when schedules permitted. Four years later, Joe met and married Shirley Pugh, and the Fox family, along with Shirley's three sons, became a blended family of adult children, albeit a scattered one. Even so, family gatherings were frequent.

It was about this time, having retired from Bechtel, and with time on his hands, Joe became interested in tracing the history of the Fox family. Fox is not an uncommon name, and many emails to people with that name led to interesting connections. Joe became an expert in Y-DNA and his research led to a published book entitled "Growing with America; the Fox Family of Philadelphia." He expanded the information by writing his second book "Growing with America – Colonial Roots." In 2004, Joe started the Fox Y-DNA project which has

over 300 members. Even though he is Joseph Mickle Fox the third, there are eight other ancestors by the same name, which will surely confound and confuse future genealogists.

Now a full-fledged author, Joe was on a roll and authored one more book about an ancestor, titled "Mary Hite's Story: A Pioneer Woman with Grit." It was published in 2019, before the pandemic, when Joe was a mere 97 years old.

His research and writing, which started as a hobby and grew into an almost full-time commitment, gets credit from Joe for his good health and longevity. "I honestly believe that keeping busy with something that interests me is responsible for my well-being as I aged."

Sadly for Joe, Shirley passed away in March 2020. By this time, Joe had hung up his pool leaf catcher, sold the family home and moved to Byron Park. But hold on! His story continues to grow! At Byron Park, he has made a ton of friends, played Romeo in a recent Byron Park production of "Romeo and Juliet," and with his children, hosted a birthday celebration to end all celebrations. Joe was the perfect host and birthday celebrant. It was the hottest ticket in town and was a party for the "ageless."

What is a good college?

By Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D.

If you did a survey and asked people what characteristics define a good college, you might get 100 different answers. If there is so much variation just in what constitutes a good college, we know there is even more variation in what constitutes a best fit for a particular student. But starting with features of a good college is a great way to begin. For this reason, I start my college search process with a set of characteristics in mind that I know constitute a good college in general. These I share with you below.

A good college graduates its students within four years and with as little debt as possible. It is a no brainer to assume that students and their parents are interested in the four-year college plan rather than a five- or six-year plan! Thus, it is important to know what the college's four-year graduation rate is. (Be aware that many sources only publish a six-year graduation rate). A good college will graduate at least two-thirds of an entering class in four years. Also, a good college admissions office considers the true full financial need of its students and uses

need-based aid and merit-based aid to make an education more affordable. In addition, the college makes it as easy as possible for students to keep their merit aid. This can be done by making realistic requirements for academic achievement, such as a maintaining a 3.0 GPA in contrast to a 3.5 GPA. A conscientious college will also increase aid as it increases tuition and fees.

A good college educates to the student's interests and abilities. We measure this not only by curricular offerings but by analyzing a college's learning support resources; these resources should be available not just for those students with learning challenges, but for all students – for example, athletes with rigorous practice schedules, and students whose major includes some coursework that may be especially difficult for them. Not all students who want to be finance majors are naturals at linear algebra, nor are all pre-med hopefuls whizzes at organic chemistry. A good school offers support to all students to help to ensure their academic success.

A good college helps a student test their academic direction early enough to change course, as many students do. The

reality is that 70-80% of students change their major at least once while in college. Internships and shadowing opportunities are great ways to test if the major they are pursuing will lead to a job after graduation that they will enjoy.

A good college helps the undeclared student select an academic direction early enough to graduate in four years. We know that many students are uncertain about what they want to do, but these days many colleges seem almost to "prey upon" the undeclared entry. It's one thing to welcome them but what are you doing to help the undeclared set a direction once they arrive and use their general education coursework in a way that will work for a variety of possible majors.

A good college is somewhere a student feels connected and comfortable on campus and in the surrounding community. A good college for a given student must include academic, cultural and social factors.

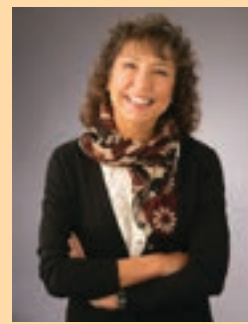
A good college has strong networking capabilities like access to internships, as well as resume and interview preparation. It also has a career center that provides an alumni system that fosters post graduate life including job searches, career

changes and professional opportunities.

A good college example: To share a little first-hand mom experience, this is something I saw clearly with one of my daughters who attended a good college. To test her academic direction, she applied to several internships. The career services center provided information and assisted with identifying internship opportunities in both the public and private sector. The center provided resume and cover letter reviews, videotaped interviews, and even told her when she fiddled with her hair too much. And, perhaps most importantly, she could see her mannerisms and hear how well she responded to questions. She's now on her second job with a very good salary in New York City – not bad for one of those liberal arts and sciences majors we hear about who struggle with entry level income. I attribute this mostly to her taking the initiative to use resources available to her and the strong support she had and still has from her alma mater.

The consideration of this set of parameters that define a good college gives you a head start in determining where you would have the greatest opportunity for a happy and productive un-

dergraduate experience.



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Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D., brings decades of admissions expertise to personally guide each student through applying to well-matched colleges, making each step more manageable and less stressful. She has placed hundreds of students in the most prestigious colleges and universities in the US. Elizabeth attends conferences, visits campuses and makes personal contacts with admissions networks to stay current on the evolving nature of college admissions. She and her professional team offer resume development, test preparation, academic tutoring, value analysis, merit and need-based scholarship search and more.