

Spinach and tomato combine for the perfect side or salmon topper



Spinach & Tomato Topper

Photo Susie Iventosch

By Susie Iventosch

I've always been a huge fan of creamed spinach — any way shape and form, and this fun and fresh version, made with cherry tomatoes, onions, garlic and grated Pecorino Romano cheese, is a healthier no-cream version. We originally made this recipe with heavy cream, and loved it, but it was really rich. So the next time, we omitted the cream and instead added Boursin cheese and really enjoyed it that way too, but still wanted something less rich. So, finally we decided to try it using only broth and wine. This recipe is the latest rendition and we are really happy with the results. You can serve it

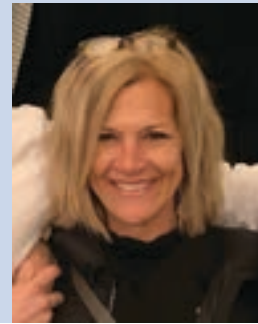
as a side dish or as a topper for fish, chicken, or even portobello mushrooms.

If you've ever sautéed spinach, you know how much it reduces as it cooks. It seems like you have a mountain of spinach, but by the time you finish sautéing it, it's barely an ant hill! So we started with a full pound of raw spinach and still, it only served four people. This topper is not really saucy, but rather more like a veggie sauté, and if you want it to be more of a sauce, you can add more broth as you go. Also, if you like a little more of the fresh green spinach color, just barely sauté the last bit of spinach you toss into the pan and it will stay more firm and green, giving the topping a

nice color.

We topped salmon filets with this the other day and that was really delicious. Simply grill or bake your salmon and serve a big scoop of Spinach & Tomato Topper over the top.

Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. This recipe can be found on our website: www.lamorindaweekly.com If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977. Or visit <https://treksandbites.com>



Spinach & Tomato Topper

(Serves 4)

INGREDIENTS

Fish

4 salmon filets (approximately 1/2 lb. each)

Topping

3 tbsp. olive oil

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 medium yellow onion, very thinly sliced

1/2 cup finely sliced basil leaves

2 tbsp. minced parsley

20 (or so) cherry tomatoes, halved

1 lb. fresh spinach leaves (I use the triple pre-washed spinach)

3/4 cup white wine

3/4 cup chicken broth (or veggie broth)

3/4 cup freshly grated Pecorino Romano (or Parmesan),

reserve a couple of tablespoons for sprinkling over the top.

DIRECTIONS

Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and sauté until just starting to brown. Add remaining oil and the onions, and cook until onions are translucent and just beginning to caramelize. Stir in the basil and parsley and continue to cook for another minute or two. Add 1/4 cup of the wine, 1/2 cup of the chicken broth, and the cherry tomato halves, and cook for about 5 minutes over medium-low heat. Add all but 2 tablespoons of the cheese and stir until melted. Begin adding spinach (a large handful at a time), alternately with remaining wine and broth. The spinach will wilt as you add it. If you like the topping to be more green, after the last handful of spinach, remove from heat immediately and it will hold its color and shape a little bit.

Meanwhile, cook the salmon filets on the barbecue or in the oven until desired doneness. Spoon the topping over the top of each cooked filet. Sprinkle remaining cheese over the top.

*Note – We place our salmon with the skin side down on a piece of foil. Grill over medium heat for 8-10 minutes, or until desired doneness. Remember every grill is different, so you'll have to cook according to your own barbecue. Once the fish is done, remove the filet from the skin, leaving the skin on the foil.



Hiring part-time college application readers

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

With the recent surge in college applications, schools have begun to outsource the work of their admission counseling staff (aka admission officers) by hiring part-time application readers. Colleges tell us that this influx of part-timers is a matter of necessity, but it is a necessity in large part created and greeted positively by colleges themselves.

How do they create these surges in applications? First, colleges send out tons of 'spam' to students encouraging them to apply using the email addresses they purchase from the College Board (makers of the SAT) and ACT (makers of ACT tests). In this spam, they compliment the student's achievements (without really knowing anything of substance about specific achievements), offer to waive the application fee, and utilize a variety of other ploys to get students to apply. One of these ploys is to inform students that at their institution, standardized testing is optional. However, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many colleges became test optional to help students apply, and most of these colleges have continued their test

optional policies because they worked! The pushiness of institutions to draw in applications is one of the reasons for the surge in applications this past cycle, and there promises to be an equal or even greater surge in the upcoming cycle.

As colleges continue to see growth in the number of applications they receive, more readers are needed to get through the sheer number of them, and most schools claim they cannot afford to hire more full-time admission officers. The University of California—Irvine, for example, expects to hire 200 part-time readers for next year's admission cycle; they hired 180 last year. Georgia Institute of Technology expects to hire 60 part-timers, while a decade ago they hired as few as three. These hires are external to the school and may consist of former admission officers from other colleges as well as others in education, such as high school teachers.

This hiring trend has been met with controversy. Admission officers in favor of the practice, argue that it allows more applications to be read and reviewed while still maintaining the integrity of the school's evaluation process. They point to the fact that

many schools employ a strict training protocol for part-time readers. Scott Jaschik at Insider Higher Ed writes, "At University of California—Irvine, new part-time readers first review 20 files from the previous year with senior full-time staff explaining why students were admitted or rejected. Then the new recruits review 10 more applications and explain why they would admit or reject them, with senior staff reviewing their decisions." When the part-time readers arrive at a conclusion, they are taken as recommendations rather than de facto acceptances or rejections, with full-time admission officers making the final call. To avoid conflicts of interests, part-timers also do not review applicants from their school district, nor do they know the names of the applicants they are reviewing.

However, some admission officers, joined by other higher education voices including many independent educational advisors, argue that the use of part-time readers may prevent all applicants from getting a fair shot at admission. They also worry that the practice is becoming increasingly common, and some are concerned about the transparency of the

process – applicants do not know whether their application is being reviewed by an admission officer or a part-time hire, and they certainly do not know how and how well the individual was trained. The University of California system's process may be the gold standard in training part-time readers, but that tells us little to nothing about how private colleges and other public university systems operate. Additionally, despite the claim that part-timers only give recommendations, those recommendations might come shortly before the decision deadlines, meaning that some applicants may not have the benefit of a review by full-time staff. This could result in many applications being reviewed and decided on only by part-time readers.

As it stands now, most admission officers seem to be in favor of the process, trusting that their school's administration can hire part-time readers that best suit the needs of the school and avoid any bias in the evaluation of applicants. On the other side, many higher education professionals, including independent college advisors are still on the fence about part-time readers and are calling for greater trans-

parency from schools who adopt this practice.



Doing College and Beyond
College and Graduate School
Admissions Services
970 Dewing Avenue, Suite 202,
Lafayette
925.385.0562 (office)
925.330.8801 (mobile)
www.doingcollege.com
Elizabeth@doingcollege.com
Elizabeth LaScala, PhD, 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.

Traditional dances performed during Miramonte's SSWANA Festival



By Emma Wong

At Miramonte's Wellness Center, traditional Hindu dance group Kalanjali Dances of India performed a Bharatanatyam-style movement for the district's South Asian, Southwest Asian, and North African (SSWANA) Festival.

Organized by students Leila Maboudian, Selma Ahmed, and Nilab Ahmed, the festival was the first of its kind to celebrate SSWANA heritage within the Acalanes Union High School District. Booths included traditional candies and pastries, educational posters, language-writing activities, and the hand decoration art mehndi/henna.

Guided by instructor Kali Futnani, the dance was performed in South Indian Bharatanatyam-style. Traditional Indian dances were banned and nearly lost as a result of British colonialism in South Asia; however, efforts to revive them led to a successful resurgence. The act performed

at the festival, called Devi Neeye Thunai, centered on a narrative about Meenakshi, a Hindu warrior goddess.

Miramonte freshman Trisha Prabandham was one of the dancers. "It was a really fun experience, especially since we have another performance on April 30," Prabandham said.

"Dancing is a great way to learn more about my culture on deeper levels," Dublin High School freshman and dancer Kiran Nayyar said. "We learn so many different stories that we're continuing to pass down."

The festival celebrated SSWANA culture in Lamorinda and also spotlighted adversities that members of the group encounter. "We were proud to bring this festival to the campus," Maboudian said. "People were very respectful and made the event enjoyable. Respecting SSWANA culture and acknowledging the challenges we face can help people step into activism and advocacy."

Photo Emma Wong

Students Bela Patel and Kiran Nayyar perform at Miramonte's SSWANA Festival on April 14.