



BASEBALL ZUCCHINI

Every summer that farmers market sells these light green, spherical squashes that I have never found at the supermarket. Their juicy deliciousness of the zucchini is gently enhanced with only a few minutes preparation. The zucchini makes for a light for appetizer when a more elaborate dinner will follow, or vegetable side dish that's so fun, even kids will eat it. It's also perfect as a party hors d'oeuvres, because you can prepare them well ahead and pop them out of the oven whenever you are ready to serve. They are delicious served hot, warm, or room temperature.

- 6 spherical zucchini
- 1 cup breadcrumbs
- 2 eggs
- sea salt
- freshly ground pepper
- herbs de provence (or dried basil, parsley, or mint)
- 3 T. olive oil
- 1 very ripe mango (or avocado, or peeled cucumber, or 3 oz. feta cheese or olive chutney)
- 3 heaping teaspoons natural mayonnaise
- 2 teaspoons prepared horseradish
- 2 heaping T grated cheese (Parmesean or Romano)
- Remaining egg from dressing zucchini above

Place baking sheet or baking dish in the oven and preheat oven to 375°.

Mix breadcrumbs, herbs, salt and pepper in a small bowl. Beat the egg in another small bowl. Trim the end of each side of the zucchini and cut in half. If the spheres are larger than 4" in diameter, cut the 2 halves again in the opposite direction. Preferably you have 12 half baseballs.

By now the baking sheet or pan in the oven should be hot. Pour the table-spoons of olive oil in the pan and close the oven door so the oil heats, too.

Dip the largest flat side of each zucchini piece into egg and then in the breadcrumb mixture. Reserve in a plate on the side until all pieces are coated on their largest side.

With an oven glove shimmy the baking dish or pan so the surface is evenly and thinly coated with hot oil. Quickly place the zucchini pieces with the breadcrumb side down, on the sheet or pan.

Bake for 1 hour or more. When the bottom side is very brown, you may turn the oven off, but keep the zucchini in the oven until you are ready to serve.

For the dipping sauce, put the peeled the mango and all the other ingredient into a blender or food processor. Drizzle on the plate or put in a shot glass on each plate for an appetizer. Put in a glass in the center of the serving platter if they are served as a party hors d'oeuvres.

This entire recipe is not precise. In fact, I have made it a little differently each time, so you may feel free to do the same. If you cannot find the squash that's shaped like a baseball, substitute any other.

The sauce given here is also very quick and requires no cooking. If mango is not available, you can substitute with a peeled cucumber, a ripe avocado, or feta cheese or some olive chutney. You may even leave out those ingredients completely and still have a lemony sauce with a sharp cheese and horseradish zing. If so double the sauce ingredients so you have enough.

What is important to preserve is the interplay of 3 textures: the crunchy bottom crust and juicy center of the zucchini and the smooth creaminess of a sauce that has some zing.