

How to . . .

create the perfect canapés. **Vivienne Gonley** serves up a little feast.

Photography **Adrian Burke**

Canapés have become a bit of a star turn on the party scene. Unlike with your proper sit-down menu, guests get to circulate and, free of the constraints of meat and two veg, as host you can pick what you really fancy. So spoil your tastebuds. As you might throw together gorgeous accessories, mix and match bright, fresh ingredients. Wrap parma ham around new season's asparagus, sear tuna and serve topped with wasabi, pass round bite-sized gooey chocolate brownies with strawberries. Quantities don't have to be set in stone either – the aim is to tempt and indulge your guests, not to overfeed them.

And, though preparation there undoubtedly is, with a bit of planning the last-minute work is easy (and easy to delegate). The trick is in preparing the components in advance. Many of these, such as roasted tomatoes, are useful to have in the store cupboard anyway, so the work will be worth it and you'll be able to assemble your canapés at an hour's notice.



Chargrilled aubergine bundles
Capture the intense flavours of Italy with these luscious bundles filled with mozzarella, roasted tomatoes, pine nuts and basil

Makes 20:
2 medium aubergines, cut into 5mm¹/₄in slices lengthways (you will have plenty of extra pieces to play with or toss into a salad)
1 125g pack mozzarella, cut into 20 pieces

20 roasted cherry tomato halves (see recipe over the page)
25g/1oz pine nuts, toasted
1 bunch basil
cocktail sticks to secure the bundles

1. Heat a griddle pan until it is just smoking. Brush the aubergine slices with a little olive oil and cook them on the griddle for 2-3 minutes on each



side until marked. If you don't have a griddle, dry fry the aubergines in a pan until slightly golden. You won't get those distinctive griddle marks but the finished article will still look lovely.
2. Cut the aubergine slices to about 10cm/4in long. Place an equal amount of filling across the thick end of each slice – squash on some mozzarella, some roasted tomato, a few toasted pine nuts and a couple of basil leaves.
3. Roll the aubergine bottom to top, flattening it slightly as you go. Carefully slice each bundle into two. Secure each bundle with a cocktail stick. When ready to serve, warm at 180C/350F/gas 4 for 7 to 10 minutes.

Really want to impress?

Tie the bundles with chives when they come out of the oven.

Dos and don'ts

Do toast the pine nuts in a pan, tossing constantly (no oil necessary), rather than in the oven – they burn in seconds so you'll need to keep a close eye on them.

Don't cut the aubergines too thin (they'll tear) or too thick (they won't roll properly)

Don't leave the bundles in the oven for too long – the mozzarella will start oozing out of the sides.

Roasted tomatoes

Slow cooking at a low temperature intensifies the flavour of good tomatoes. Vine or plum, which have an excellent flavour to start with, are the most suitable.

* Make a dressing with olive oil, balsamic vinegar, garlic, salt and pepper. Brush dressing over cut sides of halved tomatoes. Roast at the bottom of a very low oven for 2 to 3 hours. When ready, tomatoes should be about half their original size and intensely red. Keep in an airtight jar in the store cupboard or in a plastic food container in the fridge for up to a month.

Cheat a little You could replace the roasted tomatoes with bought semi-dried (also known as 'mi-cuit') tomatoes.

Exciting flavours that contrast well with almost any other canapé



Swordfish, preserved lemon and black olive kebabs

Makes 20:

450g/1lb swordfish, in 3cm/1¼in cubes
20 small preserved lemon pieces (see recipe)
20 fresh pitted black olives, halved lengthways
20 wooden skewers, ideally 10cm/4in long
For the marinade:
juice of 1 large lemon
60ml/2 fl oz extra virgin olive oil
about 1 dessertspoon chopped fresh thyme
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Up to one hour before you want to serve, steep the fish in the marinade.
2. On to each skewer, first slide a lemon piece, then an olive, then the fish, making

sure you go right to the top of the skewer.
3. Bake at 190C/375F/gas 5 for 6-8 minutes. Be sure not to overcook the fish – it should still be slightly translucent and yield to the touch.

Really want to impress?

Use sprigs of woody thyme instead of cocktail sticks, stripping off the leaves leaving just a little tuft at the top. As well as looking pretty, the thyme also adds flavour to the kebabs.

Dos and don'ts

Do put a bowl on the canapé plate for the cocktail sticks.

Don't marinate the fish too far in advance – the acid in the lemon will 'cold cook' it, changing its appearance and texture.

Preserved lemons

Make these at least four days in advance.

• Peel the skin of three unwaxed lemons into thick strips, trying to leave behind most of the bitter pith. Plunge the strips into boiling water and simmer for two minutes. Drain, squeeze over the juice of one lemon, cover with olive oil and a generous layer of fine crystal sea salt. Store in a sterilised jar for up to a month.

Cheat a little Add long strips of zest from an unwaxed lemon to marinade.

Which wine?

White

A great match for these two canapés would be a Sancerre from the Loire. Its fresh, grassy style complements the flavours without overpowering them.

Red

For both canapés you need a lightweight of wine with ripe red fruit and soft tannins. A Cru Beaujolais, such as Fleurie, Morgon, would be perfect.

Vivienne Gonley runs catering company Zafferano – visit www.zafferano.co.uk