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SPAIN . DESTINATION DINING

THIS SPANISH RECIPE IS THE PERFECT SOLUTION FOR AN IMPROMPTU DINNER

Alone, with friends or with that special someone: never run out of ideas for a gourmet meal

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Spaniards have a knack for coming up with solutions: give them a handful of ingredients and they'll work wonders. Because they thrive on spontaneity, on having friends over unannounced and on spur-of-the-moment entertaining, they're all about cracking open a bottle of good grape and whiling away the hours as we enjoy life's true pleasures. But while this style of entertaining is much desirable, what most people have to work with in the fridge doesn't always make it easy.

That's why the Spanish invented the "tosta": a Spanish-style slice of toasted bread topped with any ingredient on hand, albeit with a certain flair. Because not all flavours go well together, and that's where they bring their capacity for creative improvisation to bear. So, whether you're skilled at the stove or a disaster in the kitchen... there's a solution for everything. And that solution is a selection of Spanish-style toasts guaranteed to make you look good. And if not... let your guests be the ones to decide.

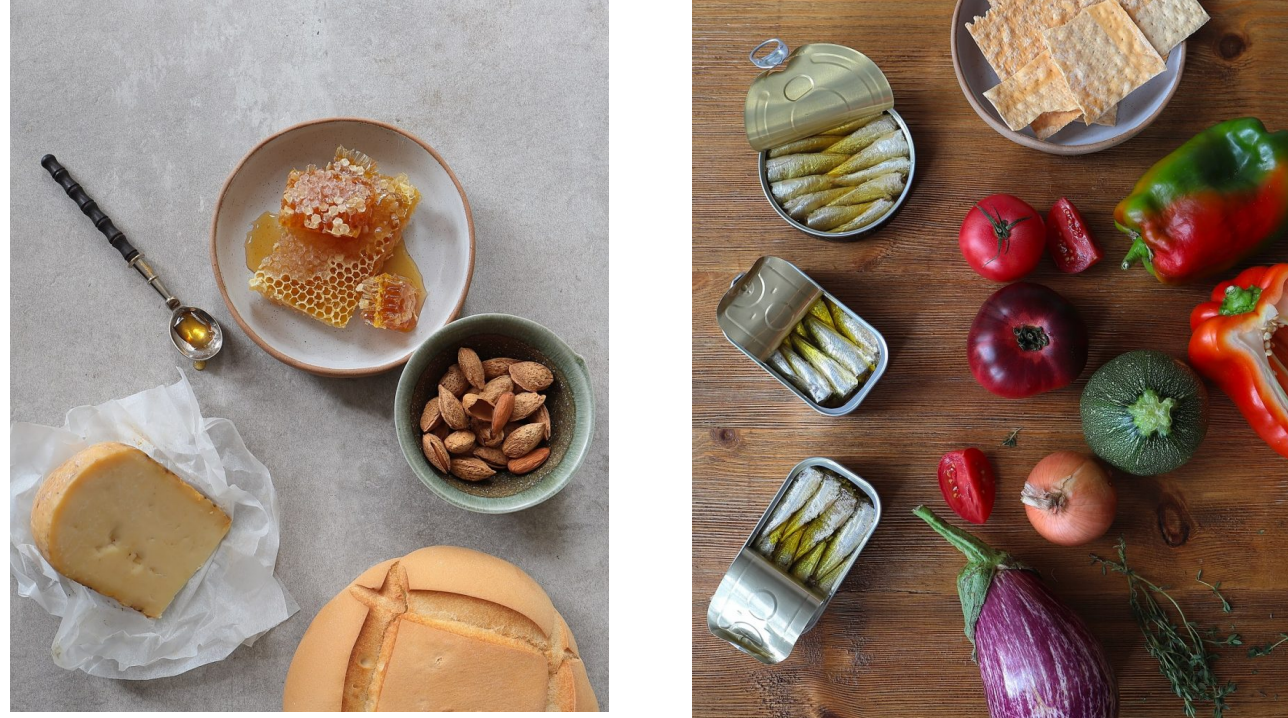


Mouth-watering delicious: Toast with honey and cheese

So simple; so exquisite. But of course, choosing a good cheese is crucial. Try Mahón Menorca cheese, which has a PDO (protected designation of origin) that guarantees it's crafted on the Balearic island (declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO) with milk from cows using an ancient technique.

Spanish cuisine is full of history, and that's the first thing that charms any foodie: its rich heritage. The method used to make this cheese has been handed down from generation to generation since the 18th century when it was already popular. The cheese's rounded edges result from how it's processed; the curds are bagged in a cotton linen called "fogasser", which are then pressed by hand to remove the whey. When it comes time to age them, the cheese is placed in cellars which provide the unmistakable flavour of Mahón-Menorca cheese. How could you not want to take a bite?

The final step is adding a drizzle of honey to this delicately placed piece of cheese on toast. This wonderful delicacy made by bees across Spain in spots like Granada, Galicia, La Alcarria and Liébana (that also have their PDO or PGI), has been the star of sweets on the Iberian Peninsula since Roman times. And whether it comes from the nectar of a single flower, or from many, the flavour is always exquisite.



Simple and easy: Toast with tomato, olive oil and cecina

A timeless classic: whether for breakfast, a snack or dinner, the delicious combination of toast, olive oil and cecina (raw beef that is salted, smoked and cured). Best of all? There's no need to light even a single burner: all you have to do is simply (yet skillfully) top the bread with the ingredients.

The first step is to toast several slices of bread: this is what will make the rest of the food shine. And while you're waiting for the bread to toast, chop up a few tomatoes; all the better if they're from La Cañada, a PGI (protected geographical indication) that ensures the most intense, exquisite flavour. Varieties include the Redondo Liso (Round Smooth), Tomate Cereza (Cherry Tomato), Asurcado (Ribbed) and Oblongo-Alargado (Oblong-Long): all are a delight for the palate, so you can't go wrong whichever one you choose. Add a splash of that liquid gold that is EVOO to the tomato along with a pinch of salt and spread it on the bread.

The final step consists of topping the toast with a few thin slices of cecina.



Look like a real chef: Toast with sardines and pisto

Spanish cuisine is big on seafood and ingredients sourced from the sea – whether the cold waters of the Bay of Biscay, the vast Atlantic or the temperate Mediterranean – are a cornerstone of southern cuisine. So, give your next recipe a little splash of the sea. How? With some sardines, which are always a hit.

And it is exactly because the seas that lap the Spanish coast are so rich in products that are so highly valued that the tradition of salting has existed in the country since time immemorial: this technique makes it possible to preserve fish for longer and easier for these products to reach more remote places without spoiling. From the immense variety of products that can be bought canned in Spain, sardines account for 10%.

But to give your toast a special touch, the recipe calls for topping the sardines on a bed of vegetable pisto. Simply toss together vegetables like zucchini, carrot, eggplant, butternut squash, asparagus or tomato and sauté them in a frying pan with EVOO and a pinch of salt. Like we said: the magic happens when you take the first bite.

The only thing left to do now is enjoy!

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