

Baked Stuffed Oysters with Salame Butter

Plain ol' breadcrumb topping just got an upgrade by swapping in ground taralli instead. They're those little donut-shaped crackers found in Italian bakeries and markets. The best ones are made with superior olive oil, of course, and produce a crunchy, flaky, deeply satisfying (read: addictive) snack. Taralli are often flavored with fennel seed, so they echo that note in the salame. Put those together on top of oysters in a classic New England-inspired preparation and you've got one hell of an appetizer.

Ingredients

2 large savory taralli (about 2 ounces), or about 14 small taralli, to yield 1/2 cup crumbs
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into bits
1/3 cup finely diced genoa salame, about 1 1/2 ounces
3 dozen oysters
6 large pepperoncini, thinly sliced, about 1/2 cup of rings

special equipment

oyster knife
small food processor

Directions

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees, with a rack in the second position from the top. Crumple some foil on a baking sheet.

Break the crackers into the bowl of a food processor and process until they are crumbs. Add the butter and pulse until it is incorporated with the crumbs. Transfer to a bowl and stir in the salame until evenly mixed. (Makes 3/4 cup.)

Working in batches, shuck the oysters, (see Cook's Note) discarding the top shell and preserving the oyster and the liquor in the bottom one, and nestle them into the foil. The foil prevents them from tipping over and losing that glorious liquor. Top each oyster with a heaping teaspoon of salame butter, then sprinkle with pepperoncini slices. Bake until the oyster is plump and the filling bubbles and lightly browns, about 10 minutes. Turn the oven to broil to get the filling just a little more browned, 1 to 2 more minutes. Repeat to shuck, stuff and bake the rest of the oysters. These guys are super-hot right out of the oven, so give them a minute before devouring.

Cook's Note

Shucking Oysters

You can get your fish monger to do this for you, and lay them all out nicely on ice for you, but it will be at a premium price. And you'd be missing out. Part of the joy in eating a delicious, sexy, luxurious oyster is the effort — and the skill — it takes to open one. The key is to securely wrap the oyster with a towel (or alternately a fancy oyster glove, if you're into accessories), locate the hinge with the tip of your knife and work your way in between the bottom and top shells with the tip. Once you've got a little leverage (you'll know when you do), push forward with the knife to separate the two shells slightly, then slide the knife along the minuscule slit across the side of the oyster while twisting the knife ever so slightly, and the two shells will pry open. Once you're in, use the knife to detach the oyster from the top shell and then do the same to release it from the bottom shell. Mind the liquid — you don't want to lose that precious liquor. It's the briny sauce that comes with the oyster. Flip the oyster to the smooth "presentation side" and serve on ice with the mignonette, or lemon, or hot sauce, or however you enjoy them.

total time: 45 mins

active prep: 30 mins

serves: 4 to 6

difficulty: moderate