

Pickled Blackberries, Smoked Mozzarella and Plums

Transformation nation. It takes just a little bit of smoke and some flavored vinegar to turn three ingredients into something special. Cold smoking — a way of preserving food without heat — imparts, well, smoky flavor to the cheese and plums, adding interest on a salame platter. Blackberries take a plunge in seasoned vinegar to add a sweet-tart note. Without much effort, your friends will think you're a genius. They're right.

Ingredients

pickled blackberries

1 cup white balsamic vinegar
1 cup water
3 tablespoons sugar
1½ tablespoons kosher salt
1 teaspoon whole green cardamom pods
1 teaspoon coriander seeds
1/4 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
2 strips lemon peel
1 bay leaf
6 ounces blackberries (about 2 cups)

smoked cheese and fruit

vegetable oil
1 (1-pound) ball fresh, salted mozzarella, halved
2 black plums, halved and pitted

special equipment

quart jar, heatproof
grill with smoke box or aluminum foil pan
baking sheet
wood chips, preferably a fruitwood such as apple or cherry

Directions

for the pickled blackberries

Put the vinegar, water, sugar, salt, cardamom, coriander, peppercorns, lemon strips and bay leaf in a small saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat, stirring once or twice. Let boil until the sugar and salt dissolve, about a minute. Put the blackberries in a heatproof jar and pour the brine over top. Let cool to room temperature, and then refrigerate while you smoke the cheese and fruit.

for the smoked cheese and fruit

Ball up a sheet of paper towel and sprinkle with oil. Put it in a smoke box or small aluminum pan on one side of the bottom grate of a charcoal grill. (If using a gas grill, set the smoker box on

one side of the grill grate.) Light the paper towel. Lean 2 charcoal briquettes against the flame and let them ignite. You don't want them to be totally on fire, just smoldering. Carefully put a handful of wood chips on top of the briquettes and let them smoke. Put the top grate on the grill.

Put the cheese and plums cut side down on a small baking sheet and place on the opposite side of the wood chips. Close the lid with the open vents over the cheese and let it smoke for 30 minutes, lifting the lid from time to time to regulate the heat, keeping the grill temperature below 85 degrees. You are cold smoking here, no flames, no heat, no melting allowed.

Serve as part of a salame platter.

total time: 40 minutes

active prep: 40 minutes

serves: 4 to 6

difficulty: *medium*