

Trio of Veggie Dips with Baked Pitta Crisps



Who doesn't love a nice selection of dips and crisps at a party or get-together?! Handy finger food that is simple and moreish, and all the better if they're homemade. However, many of the most popular dips tend to be extremely high in fat, salt and sugar, so given their addictiveness they tend not to be suitable for the health-conscious. This tasty trio of vegetarian dips is full of nutritious and fresh ingredients, packing lots of flavour with a fraction of the fat and calories. The spinach dip does contain ricotta, but ricotta is very low in fat compared to other popular cheeses. Pitta chips to accompany the dips are a fabulous alternative to crisps – since they are baked and not fried, again you are vastly reducing the fat and calories consumed. They are also perfect for using up stale pitta breads that might otherwise have been thrown away. I have used garam masala to flavour them, but feel free to use any dried spices of your choice.

INGREDIENTS

For the chickpea dip



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- 1 x 400g tin chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 1 ½ tsp cumin seeds
- 1 clove garlic
- 6 tbsp fat-free Greek yogurt (or other plain-flavoured yogurt of your choice)
- 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tsp runny honey (or vegan alternative)
- 3 tsp white wine vinegar (white balsamic also works well)
- juice of 1 lemon
- salt and freshly-ground black pepper, to taste

For the salsa

- ½ red onion, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp fresh coriander leaves
- 2 tbsp white wine vinegar (or white balsamic)
- salt and freshly-ground black pepper, to taste

For the crispy roasted chickpeas

- 1 x 400g tin chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2-4 tsp garam masala (or mixed ground spices of your choice; ground cumin/coriander/sumac, for example)
- salt and freshly-ground black pepper, to taste

For the Mediterranean sweet-and-sour red pepper and tomato dip

- 4 red peppers, finely diced
- 3 shallots, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 3 tbsp sundried tomato paste
- 1 tbsp oil from sundried tomato paste jar
- ½ tbsp caster sugar
- 2 tbsp sherry vinegar
- 2 tbsp flat parsley leaves, finely chopped
- salt and freshly-ground black pepper, to taste

For the spinach and ricotta dip

- 500g frozen spinach, thawed and strained of any excess water
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 2 shallots, finely chopped
- 1 large garlic clove, crushed
- 250g ricotta



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- 4 ripe tomatoes
- zest 1 lemon, juice to taste
- 1 tsp ground nutmeg
- salt and freshly-ground black pepper, to taste

For the pitta crisps

- 6 wholemeal pitta breads (white if you prefer)
- Fry Light olive oil spray, or 1 tsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp garam masala
- salt and freshly-ground black pepper, to taste

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 220C/200C fan. Place a small tray in the middle of the oven (this is to preheat it for making the crispy roasted chickpeas).
2. For the chickpea dip, blitz the chickpeas with 1 tbsp warm water and process till finely chopped. With the motor running, pour in the oil in a thin, steady stream, and process till smooth.
3. Add all other ingredients and blitz until thoroughly combined. Set aside.
4. For the crispy roasted chickpeas, pat the chickpeas with a dish towel on a paper towel until matt and thoroughly dry.
5. Toss the chickpeas with the oil, spices and seasoning until thoroughly coated. Place on the preheated tray in the oven, then roast for 20-30 minutes, shaking every 10 minutes, until golden and slightly darkened, dry and crispy on the outside, yet still soft in the middle.
6. For the salsa, combine all ingredients in a small bowl and set aside.
7. For the red pepper dip, put the tomato oil in a non-stick frying pan over a medium heat, then add the finely chopped shallot and cook for 2 minutes, or until starting to soften. Add the crushed garlic and finely diced red pepper, then cook, stirring often, for around 3 minutes, or until starting to soften. Add the sundried tomato paste, caster sugar and vinegar, then cook, stirring often, for a few more minutes, until the whole mixture is completely soft. Remove from the heat, stir in the parsley, season to taste with the salt and pepper, then set aside.
8. For the spinach and ricotta dip, heat the oil in a small non-stick pan over a medium heat. Add the shallot and garlic, then cook, stirring often, until softened and fragrant, about 1 minute. Remove from the heat.



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9. Cut a small cross on the top of each tomato, then drop the tomatoes into a bowl of boiled water for around 30 seconds. Remove from the bowl and plunge into iced water to prevent further cooking. Remove the skins from the tomatoes, then cut them all in half. Remove and discard the centres, then chop the tomato flesh into fine dice.
10. Add the thawed and strained spinach to a blender, along with the ricotta, shallot, garlic, lemon zest and juice, and nutmeg. Pulse until roughly puréed. Season to taste with salt and pepper, stir through to combine, then set aside.
11. Place the spinach mixture into a bowl, along with the diced tomato flesh, and seasoning.
12. For the pitta crisps, split the pitta breads in half (creating 2 thin ovals, ie pittas of half thickness), then cut into small triangles. On a large baking tray, toss together the pitta triangles, olive oil or spray, oil, garam masala and seasoning. Place in the preheated oven and bake for 5-10 minutes until golden and very crisp, turning halfway through cooking, taking care not to burn. Remove from the oven and leave to cool. (NB Any leftovers may be kept in an airtight container for up to a week.)
13. To serve, place each dip into a small serving bowl. Top the chickpea dip with the salsa and then the crispy roasted chickpeas (If necessary, place the roasted chickpeas on a small oven tray and return to the oven for 3-5 minutes, to crisp them up again). Serve all the dips, alongside the pitta crisps.

