

Kale & Butternut Squash Quesadilla? Yay! New Years? Meh.



For the passed several years, New Years has been a weird time for me. It's not for the regular, semi-cliched reasons either. I don't get sad when I reflect and let it sink in that yet another year has come and gone, though I do get blown away by how quickly time truly does go by. Nope. New Years has become a weird, confusing time for me lately because, well, I already did New Years.

As observant Jews, my husband and I celebrate the new year in the Fall during Rosh Hashanah, known to the world as "Jewish New Year". That's the time of year that I get a bit more reflective and/or contemplative. That's the time of year that I seek to change negative behaviors I see in myself while maintaining the good stuff I see in myself. It's during this "New Years" that I reach out to old friends to tell them how much I miss them and to make promises to be in contact more

often, though we both know it's probably not going to happen. And because we read the same portion from the Torah every Rosh Hashanah, it's so much easier to remember just where I was the year before, both spiritually and physically.

I'll never forget Rosh Hashanah from three years ago. I sat in synagogue listening to the haftorah story of Hannah and her desperate want/pleads to have a child. I sat in that service and so identified with her. My husband and I desperately wanted to be pregnant. I don't think I ever prayed so hard as I did that new year—begging Hashem to bless us with a child and asking Gd if he/she wouldn't mind glossing over some questionable behaviors from my early 20s and maybe focusing more on my recent work to help up the blessing 'ante'. Sure enough, one year later, we brought our 6 week-old baby with us to the very same synagogue to listen to the very same Torah portion and I truly never felt more grateful (or tired. She was only 6 weeks old, after all).

So, you see, this whole December 31st/January 1st thing isn't such a big deal over here. Now, I'll take any excuse to by champagne on sale and I do love the glitter that comes with this New Years (mental note: Find way to bring more glitter into Rosh Hashanah), but we already had our New Years' time of intense reflection. We still do a little count down because we are citizens of this Earth and I do LOVE watching the ball drop from Time's Square (mental note: Find way to bring a giant ball drop in Time's Square into Rosh Hashanah) but we don't go all out for New Years. Last year we started a little tradition of making homemade sushi and setting up the air mattress on the balcony for dinner and a movie al fresco but chances are, I'll be asleep by 11.

Happy New Year.



There's no "i" in "Team", but there is kale.

Ok, I made this recipe last Tuesday and I have to say, it's one of my new favorites. The crispness of a lightly buttered and fried tortilla mingled with the soft, sweetness of butternut squash and Monterrey Jack cheese just does good things to me. You don't need a lot of spice to this recipe because the natural flavors of the veggies and cheese do it for you. Make sure your kale is chopped small so you can easily get a good bite out of it once it's in the tortilla and enjoy!



As you can see by the pan, I really do cook these here recipes.



Nerd alert: I honestly do pay close attention to what goes in which layer when I make a quesadilla.



Cheese: It's the glue that holds us (and this quesadilla) together.



When it comes to quesadillas, it really is ALL about what's inside.

Kale and Butternut Squash Quesadilla:

(Makes 3 – 4 Quesadillas)

What:

1 Cup of kale, destemmed and chopped small
1 Cup of roasted butternut squash (see roasting direction here)
2 Cloves of garlic, diced
1/2 Tbsp cumin
Salt
Pepper
3 Tbsp of oil – Coconut or olive works nicely
Flour or whole wheat tortillas
Butter – for pan
1/2 – 3/4 Cup shredded cheese (I recommend Monterrey Jack or white cheddar)

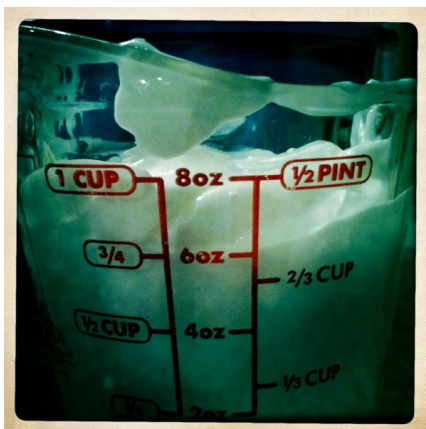
How:

Break out a sauté pan, turn the stove to medium, and put your oil of choice in the pan (coconut or olive are my go-to). Thrown in your kale and sauté for just 1 minute. Next, throw in the garlic and sauté for another minute or so or until kale is bright green. Remove from heat immediately, place in separate bowl and set aside.

Next, wipe the pan down with a paper towel and put a little bit of butter in it. Turn the heat to medium low and place one tortilla in the pan followed by a layer of shredded cheese. Next, add your sautéed kale/garlic mixture and top that with a heaping scoop of butternut squash. Smush the squash down a bit so it's evenly spread out in the center of the tortilla. Next, add another layer of shredded cheese and the other tortilla. Once that final tortilla top is on, give the quesadilla a nice final smush so that everything gets nicely “stuck” together.

Let tortilla sit on the heat for 2-3 minutes, checking a few times to make sure it's not burning. The secret to the perfect golden and melted quesadilla is too cook it slow and low (heat). After you've checked and the bottom tortilla looks good and golden, carefully flip quesadilla over using a wide spatula. If you feel it necessary, and I ALWAYS feel it's necessary, add a bit more butter to the pan and make sure it gets under the new bottom tortilla. Let sit another 2-3 minutes, checking for perfect golden-ness. Once done, remove and serve hot with favorite toppings (my go-to are sour cream, Sriracha and cilantro).

We're Back . . . and just in time for a holiday devoted to cheese!



Hello again friends! How are you? So, May was kinda busy. I mean, very busy. Actually, I have no idea how it went by so quickly but luckily it did cause it was kind of a nasty b*tch. But June, shalom to you dear, sweet June. It's officially beyond hot here in South Florida and what better time than the sweltering heat of June to start baking up a storm in preparation of Shavuot. Shavuot, which translates into 'weeks' in Hebrew, is one of those holidays I forget I truly love. Here is a holiday based entirely around love (love of Torah, love of Gd and love of learning) while also being a holiday based around the idea of renewal (renewal

of the acceptance of the Torah, renewal of one's love of Gd and renewal of one's decision to keep learning). Shavuot is the day the Jewish people renew our acceptance of the Torah. However, like in every healthy relationship, this is no one-way street of devotion. Oh no my friends. Shavuot is also the day that Gd 'regifts' the Torah to the Jewish people so that we may renew our acceptance. Now, please do not see the word 'regift' and picture Gd handing over that bizarre yogurt maker no one registered for (but somehow got anyway). That's not the type of regifting we're talking about. It's an understanding that Gd knows the Torah and all its complications is truly a gift or rather, a blessing, and Gd is telling the Jewish folk, "Look, I know this is complicated and the world is rough but I trust you and believe in you so much that I have no regrets in that original Torah-giving of 3300 years ago." It is customary to stay up all night learning Torah on the first night of Shavuot. This ultimate all nighter is seen as an embodiment of the acceptance.



Prepping for Cheesecake

It's as if the Jewish people and Gd are renewing their vows together and then we get to eat a really great brunch of blintzes, cheesecake and other delicious dairy goodies. I'm not 100% sure of where this custom came from, but some believe

that since Shavuot commemorates the receiving of the Torah, which included the kosher laws, the Jewish people could not cook meat in their pots, which had yet to be kashered. But that's besides the point. We're talking about a holiday that encourages the eating of my favorite food—cheese! Oh sweet, sweet cheese.



Cheesecake Filling

So, the first item up for Shavuot baking is actually a classic no-bake cheesecake. Cheese-freak that I am, I've never made a cheesecake. Now, because I have to make 2 days worth of meals in advance of the holiday (you can technically cook on a 'chag' but you can't start a new flame so a lot of people will keep their ovens on or a flame on their store but I'm too paranoid for that business) so I opted for a no-bake cheesecake so I could also tackle some ultimate oatmeal cookies and a cauliflower cheddar soup. See below for the cheesecake and cookie recipes (you'll have to forgive me for not including the cauliflower soup—I got too dang tired as it was the last thing I made).

Chag Sameach!!

No-Bake Strawberry Cheesecake

What?

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 8 ounces prepared whipped topping, thawed
- 1 prepared graham cracker crust (6 ounces)
- 1 pound fresh strawberries, hulled and halved lengthwise

How?

1. Beat the cream cheese until smooth with an electric mixer. Gradually beat in the sugar. Beat in the sour cream and vanilla until just combined. Fold in the whipped topping. Scrape mixture into the piecrust. (There may be some filling left over. If so, reserve it to be decoratively piped onto the top of the pie.) Chill in the refrigerator for 4 hours.

2. Starting in the center, arrange the strawberries in a circular pattern. Pipe with extra filling, if desired.



Cookie Perfection

Not Your Bubbe's Oatmeal Cookies

This is a half recipe. It makes a couple dozen standard-size cookies.

What?

1/2 cup (1 stick or 4 ounces) butter, softened
2/3 cup light brown sugar, packed
1 egg
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
3/4 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon salt (I often use a half teaspoon, but I like more salt in my baked goods)
1 1/2 cups rolled oats
1/3 cup raisins (I don't like mine drowning in raisins)
1/3 cup walnuts, chopped (optional)
1/2 cup mini morsels of chocolate chips

How?

Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C).

In a large bowl, cream together the butter, brown sugar, egg and vanilla until smooth. In a separate bowl, whisk the flour, baking soda, cinnamon and salt together. Stir this into the butter/sugar mixture. Stir in the oats, raisins and walnuts, if using them.

At this point you can either chill the dough for a bit in the fridge and then scoop it, or scoop the cookies onto a sheet

and then chill



Pre-Cookie

the whole tray before baking them. You could also bake them right away, if you're impatient, but I do find that they end up slightly less thick.

The cookies should be two inches apart on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake them for 10 to 12 minutes (your baking time will vary, depending on your oven and how cold the cookies were going in), taking them out when golden at the edges but still a little undercooked-looking on top. Let them sit on the hot baking sheet for five minutes before transferring them to a rack to cool.