

## Easy Herbal Appetizers

In the midst of holiday preparations it's nice to have some easy, quick appetizer recipes on hand when unexpected guests arrive or when dinner seems far away. Here are a few of my favorites, each made special with fresh herbs from a winter garden.

Wishing all of you the happiest of holidays, and a joyous, prosperous New Year!

### Hummus Two Ways

#### Basic Hummus Recipe

**4 cups (about 2 1/2 cans) garbanzo beans (chickpeas), drained**  
**1/2 cup tahini (sesame paste)**  
**1/3 cup warm water**  
**1/3 cup olive oil, plus more for roasting garlic**  
**Juice of 2 or 3 lemons**  
**1 whole garlic head, cloves separated and peeled**  
**Several fresh thyme sprigs**  
**1 tablespoon ground cumin**  
**Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste**

Preheat oven to 350F. Place the whole cloves of peeled garlic in an ovenproof dish. Drizzle with olive oil and place thyme sprigs around cloves. Cover tightly with foil and place in oven. Roast cloves until fragrant, soft and golden, about 45 minutes. Remove foil during last 10 minutes to allow cloves to brown. Remove thyme stems, leaving thyme leaves in dish, and let cool.

Combine chickpeas, tahini, water, olive oil and juice of one lemon in the bowl of a food processor fitted with a steel blade. Process until smooth and creamy, stopping as necessary to scrape down the sides of the bowl.

Add garlic, salt, pepper, and ground cumin to taste, and process again. Taste and add more lemon juice and seasonings as needed, and process again.

When the taste is to your liking, divide the hummus into two in separate bowls. To the first bowl of hummus blend in:

**2 to 3 tablespoons chopped fresh Mediterranean herbs (Greek oregano, thyme, savory, rosemary)**  
**More lemon juice and/ or olive oil to taste**

To the second bowl of hummus blend in:

**2- 3 tablespoons minced canned chipotles in adobo sauce (smoked red jalapenos in a vinegar and tomato sauce- found in the Latin American section of grocery stores)**  
**2- 3 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro, to taste**

Other variations include adding chopped oil- cured black olives, roasted red peppers, sun- dried tomatoes packed in oil, chopped fresh basil and/ or parsley. Serve with warmed pita wedges.



## Melted Rosemary Brie on Apple Wedges

**2 large apples, cored, cut into 1/2 – inch thick slices**

**1 10- ounce wedge of Brie**

**Chopped fresh rosemary**

Trim rind from Brie and cut into thin slices to fit atop apple slices. Arrange apples on prepared baking sheet. Top each with slice of Brie. Sprinkle with rosemary and freshly ground black pepper.

Preheat broiler. Broil apples uncovered until cheese melts, moving sheet for even cooking, about 1 minute. Transfer to platter; serve hot.

## Harvest Thyme Herbs Cranberry Sage Jelly

This ruby red herb jelly, infused with the classic flavors of sage and cranberry, is a delicious accompaniment to cheeses as well as roast meats, and makes a lovely gift. Below are instructions for how to process the jars in a hot water bath. Detailed canning instructions can be found on the box of pectin or in the Ball Canning Book. To make preparation even easier, the jars can be filled with the hot jelly and simply refrigerated for up to a month. Makes 4 eight- ounce jars.

**2 cups cranberry juice**

**1 cup finely chopped fresh sage leaves**

**3 1/2 cups sugar**

**2 tablespoons lemon juice**

**1 pouch liquid pectin**

In a covered saucepan, combine cranberry juice and chopped sage leaves.

Heat to the boiling point, but do not boil.

Remove pan from heat and let steep, covered, for 20 minutes. Strain the juice through a coffee filter.

Discard herbs.

In a large saucepan mix the prepared herb infusion, lemon juice and sugar.

Bring to a boil over high heat, stirring constantly.

Add pectin all at once; stir to dissolve.

Return to a rolling boil that cannot be stirred down.

Boil hard for exactly one minute, stirring constantly.

Remove from heat; skim off foam if necessary.

Pour hot jelly into hot, sterilized jars, leaving 1/4 inch headspace.

Adjust two- piece caps.

Process 10 minutes in a boiling water bath. (Optional- see above.)

Remove jars from water bath and set aside to cool, or refrigerate.