

A Tomato and Tvorog Galette for Summer's Bounty

Culinary traditions from Russia, Georgia and France meld deliciously.

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Tomato season is in full throttle, and I am in heaven. I've had tomatoes in every shape, color, and size for just about every meal last week. I'm happily pairing tomatoes with everything from corn to pasta, buckwheat, sausages, eggs, and, of course, cheese.

Cheese and tomatoes are a match made in heaven, no matter the cheese — be it a sharp English cheddar or gooey, runny French brie — cheese is the perfect foil for the meaty, juicy tang of a perfect tomato. But this week, I've paired my tomatoes with sulguni, Georgia's elastic brined cheese. If you've ever enjoyed khachapuri, Georgia's boat-shaped cheesy bread with melted cheese and often an egg on top, then you've encountered and surely enjoyed this

mild, elastic, and creamy cow or buffalo cheese of the Caucasus.

It used to be that Georgian sulguni was far easier to find in Russia than fresh mozzarella or burrata, and so I used sulguni in Caprese salad, lasagna, and other classic mozzarella recipes. This is no longer the case — after 2014, Russia's intrepid and innovative cheese makers began to produce excellent soft cheeses, but old habits die hard, and when I see sulguni in tomato season, my mind immediately turns to a tomato galette.

I try to make a tomato tart or pie at least once a week when tomatoes are in season. I love the combination of jammy, slightly cooked tomatoes encased in a thick buttery crust with a contrasting creamy filling. With nights getting slightly chilly now, a vegetable pie is perfect cozy, comfort food and makes a lovely simple dinner on its own or paired with a simple salad of peppery greens.

Pastry no longer fills me with dread as it once did, but I remain grateful to the simple galette — the cautious cook's best friend. The chief charm of this sturdy minimalist pie is a very simple dough that comes together quickly and painlessly in a food processor and handles equally easily: you need only roll out the dough, then pleat it up around whatever filling you desire. Any mistakes? You just call it "rustic." The galette was my glide path into baking, a godsend as I took my first uncertain and untrained steps into this aspect of cooking, handicapped by not always being able to find the right flour and almost always unsure of the quality of butter. The galette was a supreme confidence booster, facilitating many early wins in the kitchen. And that's how this quintessentially French pie became a part of my celebration of tomato season in Moscow.

Like Imperial Russia's nineteenth century European chefs, I turned a French pie into a Russian dish by substituting classic Russian ingredients: creamy tvorog takes the place of ricotta or goat's cheese while sulguni adds the elastic pull so desirable in a tomato tart.

The recipe that follows, however, is a slight twist to my regular recipe for tomato and tvorog galette. A dear friend's current obsession with pairing vegetables with a Caesar salad-type dressing was the inspiration behind the tweak. Since she always kindly tries out my recipes, I've jazzed up the tvorog filling with anchovies and a dollop of Dijon mustard to the base of tvorog and sulguni. This is a marvelous upgrade, resulting in robust and vibrant flavors that pair perfectly with ripe tomatoes. Once the galette is completely cooled, I top the top layer of cooked tomatoes with a layer of fresh cherry tomatoes and basil.

The only drawback to a galette is that it doesn't keep very well and thus should be consumed as soon as it has cooled to room temperature. But I've not found this to be a problem. Ever.

Yield: one 10-inch galette

Ingredients

For the dough:

- 1 1/2-cups (350 ml) all-purpose flour
- 2 Tbsp corn meal or potato flour
- 1/2 tsp fine salt

- 1/2 cup (118 grams) unsalted butter, cut into small cubes, then frozen in the freezer for at least 20 minutes
- 2 Tbsp vodka
- 1/4 cup (60 ml) ice water

For the filling:

- 6 oz (170 grams) tvorog or ricotta
- 2 oz (56 grams) grated sulguni cheese
- 1 egg and 1 egg yolk
- 2/3 cup (150 ml) fresh herbs: parsley, basil, mint, tarragon
- 1 anchovy or 2 tsp anchovy paste
- 2 tsp Dijon mustard
- Several robust grinds of fresh pepper
- 1 tsp fine salt
- 1/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 3 cups (700 ml) sliced tomatoes and/or halved cherry tomatoes
- Basil to garnish
- Olive oil to drizzle

Instructions

Make the dough:

- Place the flours and salt into food processor fitted with a steel blade and pulse a few times to combine.
- Add the butter cubes and pulse rapidly 6–8 times until the flour and butter turn into small pebbles. Do not over mix.
- Add the liquids in a slow, steady stream until just combined. Turn the dough onto a well-floured surface and shape into a round, flat disc. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least an hour.

Make the filling and assemble the galette:

- Line a baking sheet or tray with several layers of paper towel. Place the sliced tomatoes on the prepared surface and sprinkle lightly with salt. Toss the cherry tomatoes, if using, with the teaspoon of salt and add to the tray, cut side facing down. Set aside.
- Preheat the oven to 425°F (220°C).
- Place the tvorog and sulguni in the food processor and combine until smooth. Add the one (1) egg yolk, herbs, anchovy, mustard, and pepper and pulse to combine. Refrigerate the filling until you are ready to use.
- Pat the tomatoes lightly with more paper towel to soak up their juice.
- Roll the dough out to 1/8-inch thickness on a well-floured surface, then place on a baking sheet or pizza stone. Spread the tvorog mixture over the surface of the dough, leaving a 1-1/2-inch circumference around the outer edge.
- Arrange 2 cups of the tomatoes over the tvorog mixture, reserving the remaining cup to decorate after the galette has cooked and cooled. Bring the edges of the dough up over the tomatoes, crimping them together in pleats.
- Beat the remaining egg together with 2 tsp water and brush the mixture over the dough.

- Bake the galette for 30 minutes, rotating it 180 degrees halfway through to ensure that it cooks evenly.
- Allow the galette to cool completely before eating.
- Garnish the cooked and cooled galette with the remaining tomatoes and chopped basil.

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