

# In defense of the anchovy

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*By A.K. Whitney, Food Editor*

There are always moments in relationships when you know it is doomed, and one such moment revolved around my choice of pizza topping.

I was on the phone with my boyfriend of a few months, and I told him I had to get off the line to order a pizza for dinner.

"Cool," he said. "What are you getting on it?"

"Mmm," I said, pondering. "Probably olives and tomatoes and anchovies."

There was a stunned silence on the line. Then he made a rude noise.

"God, that is so disgusting. I can't believe you like anchovies!"

I knew that was the beginning of the end.

The level of prejudice against the silvery creatures is alarmingly high in this country.

"Too salty," the naysayers whine.

"Too fishy," they complain.

And the sad part is, most people don't seem to know what they're

so prejudiced against, because they tend to mix up the anchovy with its equally maligned cousin, the sardine.

To set the record straight, though the term anchovy is applied liberally to most small silvery fish, it really only befits one that comes from the Southern European coastlines of the Mediterranean Sea.

This would explain its popularity in Italian and French cuisine, and the fact that most anchovies are packed in olive oil. However, Northern Europeans also enjoy anchovies, since their cuisines are so laden with salty fish.

To me, a Northern European raised in part in Italy, anchovies embody the word savory. They give dishes an intense taste that makes them invaluable. They pair particularly well with more bland foods, such as eggs or grains, and best of all, a little goes a long way.

Of course, none of these arguments will convince the anchovy-hater to get a can. But it always cheers me that these people often eat anchovies in spite of themselves, in such things as Worcestershire sauce, the Asian fish sauce nam pla, and tapenades.

Insiders tell me chefs at most restaurants use the ingredient stealthily in everything from hamburgers to soups, and ``forget" to include it in the menu. So there.

However, let she who is without food prejudice cast the first anchovy. When shopping for the anchovies that went into the recipes below, I was approached by a supermarket worker. She had a big tray piled with small plastic containers full of a deep red substance, which I at first assumed was some sort of fruit preserve. But when I asked, I got the following response:

"It's beet salad."

There was a stunned silence. Unlike my former beau, I refrained from making a rude noise, but contempt laced my tone as I firmly said, "No, thank you," and pushed my cart down the aisle.

After picking up endless cans of anchovies however, I realized my mistake. I finished my shopping, then went back to the section of the store that peddled pickled goods. The worker was gone, but the tray was still there. I got a sample.

Hmmm. Not bad.

### **JANSSON'S TEMPTATION**

5 to 6 medium potatoes

2 medium yellow onions, sliced

2 tablespoons oil

2 tablespoons butter

10 anchovy fillets

6 to 9 ounces heavy cream

Peel and julienne potatoes, then soak in cold water for about 30 minutes.

Saute onions in oil until golden, then drain and set aside.

Butter a baking dish.

Drain potatoes and pat dry.

Layer potatoes, anchovies and onions in the baking dish until ingredients are used up. The upper layer should be potatoes.

Drizzle the cream over the dish, then bake in a 400-degree oven for about 45 minutes, or until golden brown.

Serves 4.

## **LENTIL SALAD**

1 1/4 cups whole lentils

6 eggs

Olive oil

Salt and pepper

4 green onions, sliced

2 ounces canned anchovy fillets, drained

4 artichoke bottoms, cut into quarters (we suggest canned)

12 small black olives

Chopped parsley

Simmer lentils in water for about 40 minutes. They should be tender but not mushy. Boil eggs until they are almost hard-boiled, then peel and quarter them.

Drain lentils and arrange them in a shallow dish. Drizzle with olive oil and season with salt and pepper.

Sprinkle the green onions over the lentils, then arrange anchovy fillets evenly in the spaces between. Arrange artichokes, olives and eggs over that, then sprinkle with parsley.

*—Adapted from ``Two Fat Ladies Obsessions.''*

## **ANCHOVY AND POTATO FRITTATA**

5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

3 large baking potatoes, peeled and sliced

1 onion, sliced

1/3 cup black olives, pitted

1/3 cup capers, drained

6 large eggs

Salt and pepper

1 tablespoon dried oregano

6 anchovy fillets, drained and chopped

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Heat 4 tablespoons of the oil in a large nonstick, oven proof frying pan over low heat. Add the potatoes and the onions, and cook for 15 to 20 minutes or until almost golden, turning with a wooden spoon.

Remove from the heat and let them cool slightly, then stir in olives and capers.

Beat the eggs in a large bowl. Season with salt and pepper to taste, then add oregano, anchovies and cooled potato-onion mixture.

Heat the rest of the oil in the skillet, then pour in the egg/potato mixture, and cook for 5 minutes until almost set. Place skillet in oven for about 5 minutes, or until top of frittata is golden.

Serve warm or cold.

*–Adapted from “Two Fat Ladies Obsessions.”*

## **ANCHOVY TOMATO SANDWICH**

6 slices of bread, toasted

Butter

2 tomatoes, thinly sliced

1 cup grated Parmesan cheese

12 anchovy fillets

Butter each slice of toasted bread generously, then cover with tomato slices.

Sprinkle each sandwich generously with cheese, then garnish each with two anchovies, arranged in an X. Bake each sandwich for 5 to 10 minutes in a 375-degree oven, or until cheese is bubbly.

Makes 6 sandwiches.

## **FRENCH ANCHOVY TART**

3 tablespoons olive oil

2 pounds onions, sliced

Salt and freshly ground pepper

For the crust:

2 cups all-purpose flour

A pinch of salt

3/4 cup butter

2 tablespoons water

15 anchovy fillets

Black olives

Saute the onions in the olive oil over low flame for about 15 minutes, or until soft. Season, then set aside.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

To make the crust: Sift together flour and salt, then cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse meal. Add water and work dough into a ball. If it is too dry, add a little more water until it becomes a dough. Roll dough out to 1/4-inch thick.

Grease a 12-inch tart pan, then line it with dough. Roll out remaining dough and cut into long strips 1/2-inch wide, set aside.

Arrange the anchovies over the bottom of the tart, then add onions. Arrange the strips of pastry in a lattice design on top and push black olives into the onions through the spaces in the lattice.

Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until tart is golden.

*—Adapted from "Two Fat Ladies Obsessions," by Jennifer Paterson and Clarissa Dickson Wright, Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1999.*