

Roasted Red Pepper Mousse with Tapenade and Pesto

For the Mousse

6 large red sweet peppers
1½ cups chicken stock
1 envelope gelatin
½ teaspoon sherry vinegar
Salt and Tabasco to taste
½ cup heavy cream
½ cup pesto (without cheese)

For the Tapenade

1 cup pitted black olives
1 tablespoon drained capers
1 teaspoon fresh thyme
1 tablespoon cognac or brandy
1 tablespoon virgin olive oil
Zest of 1 lemon

Roast the peppers in a broiler, as close to the flame as possible, turning frequently until charred—about 20 minutes or more. Enclose the peppers in a paper bag and let sweat for about 10 minutes.

Peel as much of the charred skin from the peppers as possible. Cut them in half and remove the stems and the seeds. Rinse under cold water to remove any remaining blackened skin, and dry on paper towels.

Place the peppers in a saucepan with the chicken stock. Bring to a boil, cover, and cook gently for about 30 minutes. Remove the peppers with a slotted spoon. Bring the cooking liquid back to a boil and reduce to about ½ cup.

Put the peppers and the reduced cooking liquid into the bowl of a food processor, and process until smooth. Scrape the purée into a mixing bowl. Add the sherry vinegar and salt and Tabasco to taste. Sprinkle the gelatin over the mixture and beat in with a whisk, until the gelatin is dissolved. If it doesn't completely dissolve, place over very low heat, whisking until it does.

Whip the heavy cream in a chilled bowl until stiff. Stir in ⅓ of the cream, then gently fold in the remaining cream.

Oil six ½-cup ramekins, spoon in the mousse, and smooth over the tops. Cover with plastic wrap, and chill overnight.

Place all the ingredients for the tapenade in a food processor. (The best olives for this are either Kalamata or oiled-cured olives.) Pulse several times until the mixture is coarse, but well blended.

Fill a sink with 1½ inches of hot water. Run a thin-bladed knife around the edges of each mousse. Set the ramekins in the hot water for a few seconds. Unmold onto serving plates, and decorate the tops with the tapenade and the pesto.