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A Worldwide Vegetarian Journey to Discover the Foods That Nourish America's Immigrant Soul.

November 2021

**SO YOU HAVE A PANINI PRESS;
DON'T YOU JUST LOVE IT:**

Grilled French Toast

Grilled Pineapple with Honey – Lime Dressing

Omelet Sandwiches

***Panini* with Peanut Butter and Bacon**

***Panini* with Sun-Dried Tomatoes and Goat Cheese**

Peach *Caprese Panini*

***Quesadillas* with Yellow Summer Squash
and Mango–*Cilantro Salsa***

“Little bread,” *panini*, the wonderful grilled Italian sandwiches that anyone who has visited Italy has learned to love, are within our reach whenever we get the urge if we have our own *panini* press. As a child I enjoyed the grilled cheese “Sunday Night Supper” sandwiches that my mother made occasionally using her silver waffle iron/sandwich iron. They were messy and gooey and so was the waffle iron afterwards. Years later I tasted *panini* after *panini* and found that no two were the same. Here was the opportunity to experiment! Every grilled cheese sandwich could be more than just a grilled cheese sandwich. How about a grilled *panini* with ripened *brie* and raspberry jam or even chutney? It’s good, trust me.

When I bought my own *panini* press I found that the wonderful non-stick-coated plates with grilling surfaces had replaced my mother’s flat, unprotected plates making the grill plates easy to clean. Stainless steel had replaced the pretentious silver exterior and that too was easy to clean . . . no Monday morning silver polishing and having to wrap the waffle iron in silver bags to prevent tarnishing . . . As you will see in this collection of recipes, there was also no need to restrict my thinking to “Sunday Night Supper grilled cheese sandwiches” because this tool has more potential than I could have imagined.



Using a cookbook or using a written recipe was a sign of insecurity to my mother-in-law although she did admit that a dish always tasted the same when I made it. Despite the pride streak of Italian cooks, there were cookbooks in the sixteenth century and in one of those ancient guides to chemistry and consistency one will find the first reference to a *panini*-like sandwich. The popularity of grilled sandwiches soon blossomed but almost exclusively in Northern Italy. By the 1970s and 1980s there were bars in Milan called *panioteche* that offered *panini* with your drinks. Although *panini* were first introduced in the United States in the mid-

1950s, the passion was slow to overtake Americans who have clung to their fried sandwiches of white bread and American cheese or occasionally adventuring into the English version with Cheddar cheese. You can, of course, still find those sandwiches in every diner and sandwich shop.

If you look at the recipes below you may well wonder that I did not call this column “comfort food.”

GRILLED FRENCH TOAST

TPT - 47 minutes

My dad, who at one time ran a camp at Hudson Bay Outpost and was used to a mess tent of hungry boys each morning, made French toast that was divinely custardy on the inside but firm on the outside. To avoid the scrambled egg taste one often gets when using whole eggs to make French toast, Dad used egg yolks only in his whole milk-egg soaking mixture; the egg whites that were leftover were frozen for one of my mom's bavarian desserts or for baked meringues. We only made French toast when we had several-day-old, slightly-stale, homemade bread made without dough conditioners or stabilizers. I worked for years to create a compromise that would reduce the saturated fat of Dad's tried-and-true 3 parts whole milk to 1 part egg yolk mixture and still preserve the custardy texture of what we always referred to as “French Toast RFA.” The one-percent milk and fat-free pasteurized eggs combination does give a result that is sufficiently custardy on the inside and firm on the outside whether the toast is fried or baked or grilled, as in this recipe. We find this panini grill technique to be a very efficient and low-fat way to prepare French toast for just the two of us as a light evening supper.

- 3/4 cup one-percent milk**
- 6 tablespoons fat-free pasteurized eggs***
- 1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- Pinch freshly grated nutmeg**

- 4 3/4-inch thick slices day-old bread****

In a mixing bowl or large measuring cup, combine milk and pasteurized eggs with ground cinnamon and nutmeg. Using a fork, beat until thoroughly blended. Divide milk-egg mixture between **two 9-inch pie plates**. Place bread slices in pie plates for about 10 minutes. Using a spatula, turn bread slices over and allow to stand for an additional 10 minutes. Using a spatula, transfer bread to bottom plate of **panini press**. Pour any leftover milk-egg mixture on top of bread slices. Set temperature at 325-350 degrees F. Close top and grill until French toast is golden brown and lightly marked. Transfer to a heated platter.



Serve with butter, pure maple syrup, fruit sauces, fresh fruit, or just a sprinkling of sugar.

Yields 4 slices
adequate for 2 people

Notes: *Because raw eggs present the danger of *Salmonella* poisoning, commercially-available pasteurized eggs are recommended for this dish.

**The bread should be several days old. Freshly baked bread has a tendency to fall apart when soaked in the milk-egg mixture.

When I need to double or triple for brunches and overnight guests, I prefer to bake the soaked bread slices in the oven—400 degrees F., 10 minutes on each side. It will save you time and give you the opportunity to sit down and eat with your guests.

1/4 SERVING (i. e., slice exclusive of syrup, sauces, or sugar) –
PROTEIN = 17.6 g.; FAT = 1.9 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 79.6 g.;
CALORIES = 300; CALORIES FROM FAT = 6%

GRILLED PINEAPPLE WITH HONEY – LIME GLAZE

Piña Parillada con Lima

TPT - 2 hours and 14 minutes;
2 hours = marination period

I remember well the difficulty my mother had peeling and removing the eyes of fresh pineapples. Once that was done, the pineapple had to be cored and sliced. Fresh, cored pineapples are always available in my stores even out here in the middle of the country. This saves a great deal of time and effort. These pineapple slices can be prepared easily on top of the stove using a grill pan, using a panini press, or, if preferred, on an outdoor grill, even at a picnic site. The grill marks really look quite attractive. We serve these as a side or dramatic garnish with grilled or roasted vegetables or as a dessert with cookies or plain cake squares.

1/4 cup honey
2 teaspoons freshly grated lime zest
2 1/2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice
1 1/2 tablespoons freshly squeezed orange juice with pulp

4 large thick crosswise ring slices of ripe pineapple*

Fresh mint leaves, for garnish

In a *glass* baking dish, large enough to hold the six pineapple slices in a single layer, combine honey, lime zest, and lime and orange juices. Using a wire whisk, combine thoroughly.

Place cored pineapple slices into the marinade, turning to cover both sides. Cover dish with plastic wrap and allow to stand at room temperature for 2 hours. Turn each pineapple slice over, recover, and allow to stand at room temperature for an additional hour. Remove pineapple slices to a broiler pan. *Reserve marinade to serve as sauce.*

Preheat **grill pan** or **panini press**.

Grill pineapple slices on heated grill pan or *panini* press. Turn when the pineapple slices *just begin to color*. *Watch carefully since the sugars can char quite quickly.*

Transfer broiled pineapple to serving platter. Pour reserved marinade over.

Serve warm or chilled, as preferred. Garnish with mint leaves before serving.

Yields 4 servings



Note: This recipe can be halved and doubled, when required.

1/4 SERVING (i. e., per slice) –
PROTEIN = 0.5 g.; FAT = 0.3 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 33.6 g.;
CALORIES = 128; CALORIES FROM FAT = 2%

OMELET SANDWICHES

TPT - 18 minutes

Soup-and-a-salad or soup-and-a-sandwich are favorites and frequently the meal plans in our busy lives. Omelets and sandwiches rank high on the American comfort food list and this sandwich garners considerable appreciation. We have two of those inexpensive and wonderfully useful individual skillet enabling us to prepare two of these omelets simultaneously.

1 1/2 tablespoons *finely* chopped onion
1 1/2 tablespoons *finely* chopped orange or
yellow sweet bell pepper
1 tablespoon *petite diced*, canned tomatoes
—well-drained
2 teaspoons butter
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 egg
2 teaspoons light cream or half and half
Pinch salt

2 slices Italian bread
2 teaspoons butter

Set up *panini* press.

Using an **individual 4 1/2-inch, non-stick-coated skillet** set over *MEDIUM* heat, combine *finely* chopped onion and pepper with diced tomato, butter, and black pepper. Sauté until onions are softened.

In a small dish, combine egg, cream, and salt. Using a small whisk or a fork, beat egg mixture until there is no evidence of egg white. Add to vegetables in skillet. Stir.

Meanwhile, butter both sides of the bread slices. Grill in *panini* press until browned and well-marked.* Transfer to a heated plate.

Finish the omelet by tipping the pan to bring any remaining liquid into contact with the hot pan. Loosen. Slip out onto one of the grilled bread slices.

Serve at once. Eat as a traditional sandwich or cut omelet in half and create two open-faced sandwiches.

Yields 1 serving

Note: *Bread can be fried in a large skillet, if preferred.

1 SERVING – PROTEIN = 14.7 g.; FAT = 20.7 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 49.3 g.;
CALORIES = 426; CALORIES FROM FAT = 44%



PANINI WITH PEANUT BUTTER AND BACON

TPT - 16 minutes

I was not surprised when I explored the research on peanut and tree nut allergies. Most mothers in my generation offered smooth peanut butter as one of a child's first foods; no child went to first grade without a peanut butter and jelly sandwich at least once a week; no child was moved away from the peanut butter and jelly eaters; no notes went home about exposing allergic children to our child's lunch; and no school board voted to ban peanut butter from school cafeterias. Peanut butter was as important to post-World War II nutrition in America as Vegemite was in Australia. It never made sense to me that Israeli children are weaned on peanut butter and that my neighbor went crazy at Halloween and usually ended up in the ER with one of her children. It should say something, even to the layman, that early exposure to peanuts and tree nuts might well be the answer to this enormous "peanut allergy" situation in our country. When we traveled, a jar of peanut butter was always in our carry-on. Even in countries where peanut butter was expensive, we had insurance because you could always buy bread or crackers . . . and jelly, if we wanted it. I remember Christmas Eve 1983 in Moscow when we contributed our peanut butter and crackers to a late night celebratory repast during which a group of Americans thought of home. We used to shop at a cheese store on Long Island where the proprietor would grind peanuts right before our eyes . . . no salt, no sugar, no preservatives, no additives, nothing but peanuts. Today organic, additive-free peanut butter sits on the shelf in every well-stocked grocery. Vegetarians and vegans are always seeking out legumes that they really like to complement their amino acid intake when one of the best is so convenient "it could bite you," as my grandmother would say.



2 slices soy bacon

4 bread slices

1 tablespoon butter—softened to room temperature

3 tablespoons *additive-free smooth or chunky* peanut butter, as preferred

4 teaspoons jelly *or* jam, of choice

In a skillet set over *LOW* heat, fry bacon until lightly browned. Transfer to paper toweling to dry. Cut crisp bacon strips in half.

Spread 1/2 teaspoonful of softened butter on one side of each slice of bread.

Put two slices *butter-side-down* on the bottom plate of the ***panini* press**.

Put the remaining two buttered slices *butter-side-up* to the side.

Spread 1 1/2 tablespoonfuls of peanut butter on each of the unbuttered bread slices on the *panini* grill.

Place bacon on top of the peanut butter, allowing it to extend from each end of the bread slice if necessary.

Place the reserved bread slices *butter-side-up* on top. Close the grill press.

Grill sandwiches at about 325-350 degrees F. until the bread slices are browned and well-marked.

Remove from *panini* press, slice in half. Put a teaspoonful of jelly *or* jam on each half. *Serve at once*.

Yields 2 servings

Note: This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/2 SERVING – PROTEIN = 13.9 g.; FAT = 14.3 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 58.5 g.;
CALORIES = 392; CALORIES FROM FAT = 30%

PANINI WITH SUN-DRIED TOMATOES AND GOATS' CHEESE

TPT - 16 minutes

There are so many combinations that you can put between slices of bread and grill using a panini press or sandwich grill. This combination is wonderfully flavorful and very satisfying. A complex salad with toasted nuts and roasted vegetables complements. A fruit ice cream perfectly sweetens the ending.

4 bread slices

2 teaspoons butter—softened to room temperature

2 tablespoons goats' cheese with honey

3 jarred sun-dried tomato slices—well-drained and slivered

6 pitted black olives—sliced

2 slices fresh mozzarella cheese



Spread 1/2 teaspoonful of softened butter on one side of each slice of bread.

Put two slices *butter-side-down* on the bottom plate of the **panini press**.

Put the remaining two buttered slices *butter-side-up* to the side.

Spread a tablespoonful of goats' cheese on each of the unbuttered bread slices on the *panini* grill.

Divide slivered sun-dried tomato slices and olive slices between the slices on top of the goats' cheese.

Top each with a slice of *mozzarella*.

Place the reserved bread slices *butter-side-up* on top. Close the grill press.

Grill sandwiches at about 325-350 degrees F. until cheese is melted and the bread slices are browned and well-marked.

Remove from *panini* press, slice in half, and *serve at once*.

Yields 2 servings

Note: This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 19.6 g.; FAT = 15.9 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 56.2 g.;
CALORIES = 446; CALORIES FROM FAT = 32%

PEACH CAPRESE PANINI *Panini Caprese con Pesca*

TPT - 17 minutes

A classic Italian Caprese salad on the menu still promises. Ripe tomatoes with fresh basil leaves, fresh mozzarella, and a vinaigrette made with the fruitiest extra virgin olive you can find are the basic requirements. The basic four ingredients can turn chilled macaroni into another kind of Caprese salad for your repertoire or, combined between bread slices and grilled on a panini press, it can become a classic Caprese panini. Late July through August, the peak of the local peach season here, I often change out the fruit substituting local peaches for tomatoes.



1 tablespoon *extra virgin* olive oil
Pinch *granulated sun-dried* tomatoes
Pinch Italian seasoning mixture*

1 teaspoon *softened* butter
2 slices Italian bread
1 peach—peeled, pitted, and sliced into four slices
8 large fresh basil leaves
2 slices fresh *mozzarella* cheese—each halved
2 slices Italian bread
1 teaspoon *softened* butter

In a small dish, combine oil, granulated sun-dried tomatoes, and seasoning mixture. Mix well.



Spread 1/2 teaspoonful of softened butter on one side of each slice of bread.

Put two slices *butter-side-down* on the bottom plate of the ***panini* press**.

Put the remaining two buttered slices *butter-side-up* to the side.

Brush 1 1/2 teaspoonfuls of the seasoned olive oil mixture over each slice.

Place a peach slice at each end of each slice on the grill.

Top the peach slices with basil leaves—four on each sandwich base.

Place a half slice of *mozzarella* at each end of each sandwich base on the grill.

Place the reserved bread slices *butter-side-up* on top. Close the grill press.

Heat to 350 degrees F. Allow sandwiches to grill until heated through, until cheese is melted and until bread is well-marked, browned, and crisp. Using a spatula, remove sandwiches to a bread board. Slice in half.

Serve at once.

Yields 2 servings

Notes: *My Herbed Italian Seasoning Mixture recipe can be found in *recipe archives – May 2018*.

This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/2 SERVING – PROTEIN = 13.9 g; FAT = 17.2 g; CARBOHYDRATES = 53.9 g.
CALORIES = 423; CALORIES FROM FAT = 37%



YELLOW SQUASH *QUESADILLA* WITH BEANS AND MANGO-CILANTRO SALSA

Quesadilla con Calabaza, Judia Pinta y Salsa de Mango

TPT - 19 minutes

This is another interpretation of the “little cheese thing.” Quesadillas are on menus everywhere today. Once you have tasted a quesadilla, your creativity will awaken. What I love about these South American sandwiches is that there are so many possibilities. Commercial salsas can be used in this recipe but mango-cilantro salsa gives this one a soft, sweetness that is irresistible. This takes little time to assemble and grill and, on a busy schedule, presents a wonderful opportunity to practice “mis en place.” I always prepared quesadillas in the oven until the panini press became a fixture in our kitchen . . .

1/4 teaspoon high-heat safflower or sunflower oil

Two 8-inch flour tortillas

1 cup shredded queso fresco, Monterey Jack, provolone, Fontina, or Havarti cheese*

1 cup yellow summer squash—peeled, seeded and diced

1/4 cup MANGO – CILANTRO SALSA

[see recipe which follows]

2 tablespoons canned kidney beans or black beans—well-drained

2 tablespoons chopped mild green chilies

Shredded lettuce, for garnish

Light dairy sour cream, for garnish



Brush one side of each *tortilla* with oil.

Place one *oil-side-down* on the bottom plate of the plate of the *panini* press. Reserve the other until required.

Scatter cheese evenly over the *tortilla* base.

Scatter diced yellow squash over.

Spoon prepared *salsa* here and there over the vegetables, keeping it away from the edge.

Scatter the beans and chopped green *chilies* over.

Place the remaining flour *tortilla oil-side-up* on top. Close *panini* press.

Set heat at 350 degrees F. Grill until cheese is melted and *tortillas* are well-marked. Remove to a breadboard. Using a sharp knife, cut the *quesadilla* into quarters.

Serve at once, garnished with shredded lettuce and sour cream.

Yields 4 servings
adequate for 2 people

Note: *Choose a semi-soft cheese that melts well. *Mozzarella*, in our experience, results in a very gooey sandwich.



1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 6.0 g; FAT = 6.1 g; CARBOHYDRATE = 8.7 g.
CALORIES = 142; CALORIES FROM FAT = 39%



MANGO – *CILANTRO* SALSA

TPT - 1 hour and 8 minutes;
1 hour = flavor development period

The use of both pureed and diced mango gives textural interest to this sauce/relish. It is an exciting combination but does complement without overwhelming.

1/2 medium, ripe mango—peeled and *coarsely chopped*
1/4 cup well-washed fresh coriander (*cilantro*) leaves
1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lime juice

1/2 medium, ripe mango—peeled and *chopped into 1/4-inch dice*
1 tablespoon *finely* chopped Italian red onion
1 1/2 tablespoons commercially-available *chunky salsa*
—mild, medium, or hot, as preferred*



In the work bowl of food processor, fitted with steel knife, combine *coarsely chopped* mango and lime juice. Process until very smooth. Turn into a mixing bowl,

Add *diced* mango, *finely* chopped red onion, and *salsa*. Using a wooden spoon or a rubber spatula, *gently* mix. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 1 hour to allow for flavors to meld.

Turn into a serving bowl. *Serve chilled*. Refrigerate leftovers.

Yields about 1 cupful

Notes: *The “heat” of this relish can be adjusted to taste by the use of the commercial *salsa* which is most comfortable to your taste. If a hotter relish is desired, try adding a drop or two of a *jalapeño* sauce.

This is an excellent addition to salads, *tortilla* dishes, *quesadillas*, and *tacos* or as a condiment with eggs, veggie burgers, and soy sausages.

This sauce may be doubled, when required.

1/8 SERVING (i. e., 2 tablespoonfuls) –
PROTEIN = 0.2 g.; FAT = 0.1 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 6.2 g.;
CALORIES = 25; CALORIES FROM FAT = 4%

What sweet do you find irresistible over the holidays? Candy canes?

I didn't think so.

We'll end the year with a few chocolate treasures.

If you have time, do drop by.

Judy

Please note that all food value calculations are approximate and not the result of chemical analysis.

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