

Autumn Panzanella Salad

Recipe created for COVALEY by

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Panzanella is a Tuscan peasant bread salad of soaked stale or toasted bread, red onions, tomatoes and basil dressed with olive oil and vinegar. The name Panzanella is a portmanteau of "pane", Italian for bread, and "zanella", a deep plate in which it is served.

For the best Panzanella, you will want to use a flavorful, hearty bread

that is sturdy enough to soak in the juices from the tomatoes and vinaigrette without becoming soggy. You will want to achieve an al dente bite to the center of the bread. I like ciabatta or Tuscan, but any rustic Italian loaf, sourdough or even French bread will work. The magic happens when the vinaigrette soaks into the toasted bread, moistening and softening it up, while infusing it with tons of flavor.

Panzanella is a study in textures; it is all at once a salty-savory, crunchy-creamy combo that is vibrant, beautiful, and will make your taste buds sing!

My recipe is inspired by authentic Panzanella recipes but is not traditional. My recipe differs by first tossing cubes of bread in olive oil and seasonings, then toasting it in the oven which will help achieve the very best texture. It then takes the bounty of the Autumn season and adds new twists and tastes to the traditional Panzanella.

This Panzanella is also great for entertaining larger dinner crowds, because you can prepare all of the salad ingredients in advance and then just finish the salad before serving.

Chef Tips

- Use a fresh, sturdy, rustic loaf of bread with a crunchy crust, such as a chewy ciabatta, a Tuscan bread, sourdough or French baguette.
- Cut the bread in at least 1-inch sized cubes, as they will hold up better when soaking in the tomato juices and vinaigrette.
- When toasting the bread, you will want the edges to be golden and crispy and the inside firm.
- Use a combination of large and small RIPE tomatoes. Using all large tomatoes will result in too much juice, potentially making the bread soggy. Also, the salad will look visually more appealing by using an assortment of tomatoes.
- Customize your salad. You can add and swap any ingredients for your favorite veggies and fruits, or omit ingredients altogether.
- Customize your dressing. Don't be afraid to make it sweeter by adding a touch of honey or tangier by adding additional vinegar one teaspoon at a time.
- All the ingredients, except arugula, should be brought to room temperature.
- Let the Panzanella Salad sit for before serving in order to produce the ideal texture with bread that's soft yet chewy and not soggy. The time allowed will depend on the type of bread used. The bread should be moist and spongy on the outside but have that signature al dente bite in the middle.
- Make the Panzanella a meal by adding grilled chicken, shrimp, salmon or steak.

Autumn Panzanella Salad *continued*

INGREDIENTS:

Toasted Bread

1 lb. ciabatta, Tuscan or hearty rustic bread cut into 1-inch cubes (about 6 cups)

Drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil, as needed

Season with kosher salt and black pepper to taste

Salad

½ lb. cherry or grape tomatoes, halved

½ lb. larger heirloom or vine-ripe tomatoes cut into 1-inch chunks

2 C. butternut squash or sweet potato, 1-inch dice, roasted and chilled

1 C. shaved Brussels sprouts

1 C. red onion, shaved or thinly sliced

¼ C. dried cranberries, (plump with a splash of water, cover in the microwave for 30 seconds, let cool)

4 slices bacon, crispy and crumbled

Shaved or grated Parmesan cheese, as needed

Fresh baby arugula for garnish

Dressing

1 C. extra-virgin olive oil

2 T. red wine vinegar

1 tsp. balsamic vinegar

½ C. fresh basil, chopped

2 T. fresh parsley, chopped

1 tsp. kosher salt

½ tsp. EACH garlic powder, black pepper

PROCEDURE:

(All of this can be done the day before or well in advance of serving.)

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Place cubed bread in a large bowl, drizzle with olive oil and seasonings and toss to coat. Place on a baking sheet and bake for 9 to 12 minutes, or until edges are golden brown and crisp and the center is firm. Let the bread cool, then place back into the large bowl.
2. At the same time, place the Butternut squash on sheetpan, drizzle with olive oil and season with salt and pepper and roast until caramelized, but still slightly al dente. *(Do not overbake.)*
3. In the same oven, crisp the bacon, cool and crumble.
4. Make the dressing by whisking all of the dressing ingredients together in a small bowl, shaking in a tightly covered jar or in a blender.
5. Shave the brussels sprouts and keep in a separate container.
6. Shave the onion and keep in a separate container.
7. Place the arugula and cranberries in a small bowl together and keep covered in refrigerator until ready to serve.

TO ASSEMBLE:

1. About 30 minutes before serving, add the red onion to the tomatoes and add a good pinch of salt and enough dressing to lightly coat the tomatoes. *(The salt and dressing will help extract all the wonderful flavors from the tomatoes.)*
2. About 10 minutes before you are ready to serve the salad, toss the tomatoes and the bread together in the large bowl and mix well so that the juices and dressing are evenly dispersed on the bread, and it absorbs properly.
3. When the bread is at the right texture, splash the butternut squash and brussels sprouts with a small amount of the dressing and gently fold into the tomato and bread mixture. **IMPORTANT:** Before plating, taste and add additional dressing if needed.
4. To the arugula and cranberries, add a pinch of salt and just enough dressing to coat the leaves of the arugula.
5. Portion Panzanella onto a platter and garnish with the arugula and cranberries, crumbled bacon and shaved Parmesan.
6. Place a COVALEY on the platter and carry away to the table. Serve and enjoy!