



HOW TO MAKE
YOUR OWN

*Anti-pasta
Platter*



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Ciao friend!

The beauty of antipasto is that it's actually very flexible in how you make it. There is no set recipe, no one way of creating this beautiful masterpiece.

Learning how to make an antipasto platter shouldn't be complicated, difficult or intimidating at all. In fact, it's rather easy once you go through it at least once.

The two trays I prepared would serve about 16 people depending on how much other food there may be around.

When I sat down to document how I made the platters shown in these images, I really wanted to make sure I shared with you not just a recipe to go by, but different considerations to keep in mind as you start thinking about all your various options.

There is no one single recipe for antipasto platters

Like many Italian recipes, you use what you can and modify to suit your tastes, without losing the simplicity of Italian culture and their love of food.

Let me make it clear, you certainly don't have to be Italian to make an out-of-this-world Italian platter!

Is it easy?

Yes, it's easy and simple, but antipasto platters are not single item trays, meaning it's a collection of various food items you serve prior to the main meal.

So it will take some prep and planning. But don't fear, because I've simplified it out and am giving you all the info I know so you too can make the perfect Italian platter!

I'll explain:

- What to put on your antipasto tray
- How to prepare it
- Tips for saving time
- And how to serve it so everyone will be impressed not only with your food but with your presentation as well!

In case you're wondering, the images displayed here are of an Italian platter I made on a Sunday afternoon.

With my tips and steps below, you'll be able to know what to do and what not to do so your tray comes out looking *magnifico* like mine!

Are Italian antipasto platters only for holidays?

Absolutely not! And guess what? They aren't just for Italians either!

Anyone can put one together and it will taste so wonderful!

Here is a list of possible times when an Italian party tray may fit the occasion:

- Holidays such as Christmas Eve, Christmas, Easter
- Summer parties with friends and family
- Weddings and bridal showers
- Wedding anniversaries
- Funerals (Italian comfort food...)
- Graduations
- Birthdays
- Valentine's Day – Even though my recipe is for 16-20 people, I included this b/c you could do a small version for a special dinner by following my basic principles below.
- Sunday meals
- Just because you want to!

Ingredients I include in my platter

Here are the various items I used to put on my Italian tray of nibbles. 😊 Some I would not buy again – I'll explain why in my tips section, but here is what I purchased and you can use them to start your list:

- Variety pack of thinly sliced Italian meats (12 oz package)
- Variety pack of Prewrapped mozzarella sticks in pepperoni, prosciutto, and salami
- Variety pack of marinated vegetables and olives (unstuffed red sweet cherry peppers, mushrooms, stuffed olives, stuffed pepperoncini)
- Marinated fresh mozzarella balls
- Jar of fresh cherry peppers stuffed with prosciutto & provolone (24 oz)
- Jar of kalamata olives non-marinated (had in my pantry)
- Jar of roasted red pepper
- Jar of non-marinated artichoke hearts
- Fresh grapes

All of these ingredients led to a beautiful and delicious party tray of Italian food that well... just made me very happy to eat!

You can choose to expand on this list or simplify it down if you prefer. There are a zillion different combinations!

How to Set up and Prepare Your Antipasto Platter!

Write out what meats you want to include.

Use this list when you go grocery shopping. Trust me, it's so easy to forget something you wanted when you've got a zillion other things on your mind.

If you are concerned about availability, talk to the meat or deli manager at the store to reserve your choices and set them aside with your name on them.

That way, they'll be sure to be there. This is most useful when hosting a very large party!

Here are many commonly used sliced meats you can choose from below. Some come in variety packs.

- Genoa Salami
- Pepperoni
- Mortadella
- Capicola
- Prosciutto
- Sopressata
- Calabrese Salami (more spicy than regular salami)

You can also include hard cured meats as well. These you can certainly buy further in advance than the thinly sliced versions in the deli.

Consider the cheeses you want to include

Italians love their cheeses just like we do! One of my favorites is mozzarella cheese, but you have to get the right kind.

- Fresh mozzarella – this is the best. Look for those that are small (not tiny) balls. Not the large balls that you have to cut up. If you have the choice between marinated mozzarella and plain, it's up to you, but you can certainly get one of each for your trays to satisfy varying tastes and preferences.
- Mozzarella sticks pre-wrapped- if you look at the prepackaged mozzarella sticks that you give to kids or hungry husbands, you'll realize these are kind of big for wrapping in your meat slices.

That's one reason I bought mine prewrapped b/c the size was much more appropriate. Mozzarella sticks are an Americanized attempt at making it last longer, but there is no comparison. This is the only time I buy the sticks – when they are for wrapping.

While mozzarella is certainly a signature items for Italian trays, you'll want to consider if you wish to include any other Italian cheeses.

Remember, cheeses like American cheese, cheddar cheese, or Brie are NOT Italian cheeses. That doesn't mean they don't have a place at the serving table (I LOVE Brie!!), but they don't belong in your Italian... and I repeat *Italian* antipasto tray. 😊

There are other Italian cheeses you can use besides mozzarella. Such as:

- Provolone - if you buy it sliced you can roll them or wrap them around another ingredient. Be creative!
- Romano Pecorino – this is a hard cheese and if you serve it, I'd recommend doing so in thin slices. It has a strong flavor and can be more pungent. Parmesan Reggiano in my opinion is less bold in flavor, but still very good.
- Fontina cheese – this is a soft cheese and goes great with crackers!

These are all fresh cheeses, so you'll want to keep them refrigerated and not let them sit out until you are ready.

You can use the soft cheeses to stuff any vegetables such as the sweet cherry peppers, pepperoncini or large olives, you can even stuff some dates!

Ah Yes, we must talk Olives!

Okay, so you can buy the straight Italian green olives and that's fine. Make sure they are fully ripe. However, you really want a mix of Mediterranean olives.

Tips:

- Jar of mixed Italian or Mediterranean olives.
- Buy Pitted olives. I'm paranoid of anyone accidentally choking on a pit, so I always use pitted. Plus, unless your guests know how to gracefully spit out the pits, it might be a rather awkward moment.
- If you can find the marinated Italian black olives, go for it! Not everyone likes them, but if anyone does they'll be sure to thank you as they are a real treat as they are hard to find in the stores.
- Marinated vs. packed in brine. Totally up to you, just keep in mind that anything marinated is going to be very oily even if you give them a rinse. Make sure to also provide proper serving utensils for your oily olives b/c oily olives means oily fingers and plates! I always buy my olives in water.

Peppers & Mushrooms & Artichokes

The three types of peppers included in my tray are roasted red peppers, sweet cherry peppers, and pepperoncini.

All came stuffed except the red sweet cherry peppers. So I took a few of the mozzarella balls and shoved them into the cherry peppers and it totally transformed the flavor! So good!

- Roasted red peppers can be purchased in jars and I recommend going this route. Trying to roast them yourself takes too much time unless you are really wanting a truly authentic homemade antipasto platter!
- Stuffed olives with prosciutto and cheese – I saw these at the store and purchased them. The flavor was fine but they were marinated in oil and it was really messy. Oil was even on the jar itself, that was fun getting my hands clean while at the store. 😊

A note about anything stuffed pre-bought. While everything tasted wonderful, the skin on almost each of the stuffed peppers was tough and not soft.



So I cut it with a fork and knife and that was okay, but it would have been much better if they had been softer.

This is what I used. I'd recommend against this particular one above and just stuff some yourself.

I think I'll buy them unstuffed in a jar next time and stuff them myself using something like sweet cherry peppers. Hollow them out and stuff them with cheese or prosciutto.



This is why for some items if you have the time, I'd recommend stuffing your own ingredients... if possible.

- My marinated mushrooms came in the multi-pack of stuffed items. But honestly, I was really surprised how good they tasted. Don't let the mushrooms throw you off, include them if you want.
- The artichokes were not marinated and I found that because of all the other flavors, the simplistic flavor of the artichokes provided a nice balance to the other stronger ingredients. I also sliced these in half lengthwise making them easier to eat and easier to prepare.

Last but not least... Frutta!

Including fresh fruits can really help add a little more sparkle to your tray. Here are just a few ideas:

- Fresh grapes
- Dates (stuffed or plain)
- Olives (already mentioned above)
- Fresh Figs
- Marinated tomatoes – okay for this I recommend marinating your tomatoes. Use cherry tomatoes or a meaty tomato like Roma or San Marzanos. Chop them up and place in a bowl near or on the tray.

How to Display Your Italian Food Items on the Platter

I'm listing a few tips as guidelines for you to follow. You can use my picture as well as a guideline for inspiration.

The trays I bought from a Dollar General store for 2 dollars each. Yeah, seriously.

Now, for a high-end event don't do that. Use a beautiful silver tray or glass tray, something that doesn't yell "budget-friendly" to your guests.

Here are three things to remember when creating your antipasto tray:

- Color
- Texture
- Layers

Let's first talk about color.

Your tray is going to consist primarily of red from the meats, green from the peppers and olives, and brown/tan from the mushrooms and artichokes.

Oh yes, and white from the cheese.

The dish can look pretty blah if the colors are just sectioned off in groups based on ingredient. So break it out into smaller sections and disperse the more colorful ingredients in areas where it may be too solid of a single color.

Remember that red and green are complimentary colors, so I made sure to put my green olives next to some of the red salami. Likewise I placed the bright red cherry peppers strategically next to the blah colored artichokes as you'll see on one of my trays below.



I alternated the rolled meats with color on either side. This way, it wasn't a solid row of the rolled meats without anything breaking it up.

I had so much sliced salami and other meats on hand that I used them as a border underneath the ingredients. Some people put rows of lettuce for the contrasting green (which is nice until it wilts). See here below:



This leads into Layers.

Layers add depth and make the tray more visually impressive.

Some items you may not be able to layer due to size, but even the artichoke hearts I stacked to provide some extra depth.

I chose to put the olives and mushrooms in the center of the tray in bowls to be a focal point. I felt this was fitting and a great way to keep the olives from rolling off the tray. I also added a few here and there on the tray to give it some extra texture and depth.

I wish I could tell you where these cute bowls are from, but I received them as a gift from my sister for dipping sauces! They worked perfectly for this presentation!

You can get a set of dipping bowls like the colorful ones shown here on Amazon, or even opt for white ones.



When I ran out of the wrapped mozzarella, I used some of the sliced meats to wrap the roasted red pepper strips I had cut up from my purchased jar of roasted red pepper. It was a clever way to make these wet and slippery peppers stand a chance of not sliding off the platter!

Lastly, Texture

With a mix of items like the ones shown, you'll have a wonderful variety of textures! Whether the soft and moist fresh mozzarella balls, or the soft olives, or the slightly chewy and oh so good prosciutto wrapped around the firmer mozzarella sticks... it was a delicious combination.

Don't forget the nice refreshing crunch of the grapes!

Don't forget the Wine!

Your guests can enjoy any of the following types of wine:

- Semi-sweet dry red
- Prosecco - it's a sparkling wine
- Pink wine
- White wine for those who only like whites

I hope you've found this most helpful for when you create your own antipasto tray. I would love to hear how yours turns out and what variations you were able to create! I know it will be beautiful!!

Grazie,

Liz