

Warm Walnut Panzanella with Bacon, Tomatoes, and Olives

Recipe 66 of 365

This is a rough recipe; I drizzled the oil and vinegar on without measuring (and WOW did that feel good). Use your judgment when dressing the croutons and the salad, depending on how crunchy you want to keep the croutons.

TIME: 30 minutes

MAKES: 6 meal-sized servings

1 small (1-pound) loaf walnut bread, cut into 1" cubes

Extra virgin olive oil (plus olive oil spray, if you have it)

Salt and freshly ground pepper

1 pound thick-cut bacon

Balsamic vinegar

6 ounces (6 big handfuls) mixed baby winter greens, spring mix, or chopped frisee

1 (12-ounce) container cherry or grape tomatoes, halved

1 1/2 cups kalamata or nicoise olives

Bleu cheese and/or toasted walnuts (optional)

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicon baking mat.

Spread the bread cubes out on the baking sheet in an even layer. Using a pastry brush (or olive oil spray), coat the cubes on all sides with a thin layer of the oil. Season the cubes with salt and pepper, and bake until the cubes are nice and toasty, about 10 to 15 minutes, stirring to rearrange them every 5 minutes so they toast evenly on all sides.

Meanwhile, cook the bacon in a skillet in batches over medium heat until crispy, drain on paper towels, and crumble.

When the bread comes out of the oven, transfer it to a large mixing bowl or giant salad bowl and drizzle immediately with olive oil and vinegar, using about twice as much oil as vinegar. More of each will yield softer croutons; less will keep them more crunchy. Add the greens, tomatoes, olives, and optional cheese and/or walnuts to the bowl, and toss to combine. Add additional oil, vinegar, salt, and pepper, if needed. Pile the salad onto plates and serve while the croutons are still warm.