

REVIEWED

By John De Lorenzo at 7:04 pm, 7/7/06

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Living

How can I serve roasted garlic? Does it have a strong flavor?

Garlic is renowned for its pungent flavor. But when a bulb is roasted, it becomes far milder—even somewhat sweeter.

Basic chemistry reveals why garlic tastes different depending on how it's prepared. Garlic is filled with sulfuric molecules that give cloves their sharp, almost peppery bite. The more finely you chop garlic, the more molecules are released and the more intense the flavor becomes. If you slice a garlic clove thinly, fewer molecules are released and the flavor is milder.

When garlic is roasted, the cloves are left intact. But what really tames the garlic is exposure to heat, which breaks down its molecules. The result is a gentler flavor. Consider, for example, the noticeable difference in taste between raw garlic and sautéed garlic. Roasting takes the mellowing process a step further, breaking down the compounds even more and yielding cloves that have a slightly sweet, nutty flavor.

For a simple appetizer, set out roasted garlic bulbs as



Photo by WILLIAM MEPPEN

a spread for crackers or crusty bread. Roasted garlic can also give a flavorful boost to other foods. Combine the cloves with goat cheese, work them into butter, or whisk them into vinaigrette. Roasted-garlic aioli (a more delicate cousin of the traditional version, which is made with raw garlic) can be used as a spread for sandwiches or a dip for crudites.

ROASTED GARLIC BULBS (makes 2):

2 garlic bulbs, papery outer skins discarded;
4 sprigs thyme; 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil.

Preheat oven to 425 degrees Fahrenheit.

Cut a small slice (about 1/4 inch) from the top of each bulb, exposing the tops of most of the cloves; discard. Place bulbs in a baking dish and top with thyme. Drizzle with oil. Cover with foil. Roast bulbs until soft and golden, about 1 1/4 hours.

ROASTED-GARLIC AIOLI (makes about 1 cup):

1 roasted garlic bulb (recipe above), cloves peeled; 1/2 teaspoon coarse salt; 3 large egg yolks; 1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard; 3/4 cup olive oil; 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice. Process garlic cloves, salt, egg yolks, and mustard in a food processor until combined, about 5 seconds. With processor running, pour in 1/4 cup oil in a slow, steady stream; process until mixture is slightly thickened, about 10 seconds. With processor still running, pour in remaining 1/2 cup oil in a slow, steady stream; process until mixture is thick. Stir in lemon juice.

NOTE: The yolks in this dish are not cooked. It should not be prepared for pregnant women, babies, young children, the elderly, or anyone whose health is compromised.

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