

Mamma Mia!



It's Popcorn, Italian Style

Ah, amore! From the early days of Christopher Columbus to late evenings with Frank and Tony, Americans have had an unwavering love affair with all things Italian—from sleek red sports cars to fine leather loafers; opera to artwork. And as enticing as Italian culture is, it is the food that has long captured America's fancy. Who hasn't dined on piping hot spaghetti and meatballs, fragrant garlic bread, luscious layers of cheesy lasagna, or creamy cannoli? And pizza! It is simply un-American not to like pizza, which has become as common as hot dogs, apple pie, and popcorn.

So let's get to a little old-world style matchmaking. Popcorn meets Italian in the following delicious snack mix recipes inspired by the classic flavors of Italy. And, like any successful pairing, it proves to be a healthy relationship. Popcorn is a natural whole grain and contains complex carbohydrates and fiber. Consuming at least 3 or more ounce equivalents of whole grains per day can reduce the risk of several chronic diseases and may help with weight maintenance. Happily, everyone loves popcorn, so it's an easy sell. And, popcorn lends itself beautifully to a myriad of flavors, especially the aromatic cornerstones of Italian cuisine.

The secret to Italian cooking lies in a simple premise: freshness and quality equals perfection. The best Italian cooks pour their heart and soul into their recipes, using ingredients such as fresh herbs, fine cheeses, and olive oil to impart mouthwatering flavor.

Easy Cheesy Pepperoni Popcorn is a fragrant combination of Italian herbs, garlic, grated Parmesan cheese, fresh popcorn and pepperoni that's sure to please a crowd. If you have them on hand, use fresh garden herbs for a vibrant presentation. For a truly unforgettable evening, serve this mix while catching a classic Italian movie or enjoying an impromptu Roman holiday.

Mediterranean Popcorn begins with a savory mixture of sun-dried tomatoes, olive oil, mixed Italian herbs and butter. The tantalizing blend is drizzled over fresh popcorn and tossed with crunchy pine nuts before serving. This is a treat worthy of an Italian grandmother's seal of approval. Buon Appetito!

Cheesy Pepperoni Popcorn

12 cups air-popped popcorn
 ¾ cup turkey pepperoni, cut into bite-size bits
 Olive-oil cooking spray
 ¼ cup nonfat parmesan cheese
 2 tsp. garlic powder
 ¼ tsp. dried oregano
 ¼ tsp. dried marjoram leaves
 ¼ tsp. dried basil leaves
 1/8 tsp. dried sage
 Black pepper, to taste

Combine Parmesan cheese, garlic powder, oregano, marjoram, basil, sage, and pepper in a small bowl; mix well. Place cooked popcorn and turkey pepperoni in a large

bowl; spray lightly with cooking spray. Sprinkle popcorn and pepperoni with cheese mixture and toss to coat evenly.

Serves: 4

Mediterranean Popcorn

1/3 cup sun-dried tomatoes, packed in oil, drained
 3 tablespoons olive oil
 2 teaspoons dried mixed Italian herbs (or use fresh herbs, rosemary, basil, oregano)
 ½ teaspoon salt
 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
 12 cups air-popped popcorn
 ½ cup pine nuts

In a food processor or blender, combine first four ingredients. Process to form a paste. In a small saucepan, melt butter over low heat. Stir in tomato paste. Mix well. Drizzle over popcorn and toss to coat evenly. Toss in pine nuts. Serve immediately.

Serves: 3

