

Simple Ingredients Key to Spectacular Snack



Top chefs worldwide know the key to making something fabulous in the kitchen: Keep it simple and use the best and freshest ingredients possible. Think of all those countless hours you've spent in the kitchen trying to make a complicated meal to impress guests, only to have it turn out mediocre. Or the times you've opted for the intricate menu item at the hottest local restaurant only to wish you had ordered the grilled fish.

Great food doesn't have to be labor intensive if you have good ingredients on hand. Add a few quality items to your pantry and you'll be able to serve up foods to make even the most finicky gourmet proud.

The following recipe from the Popcorn Board (www.popcorn.org) offers up a few key ingredients to create a delicious snack you'd be happy to serve to your foodie friends as well as to your kids during a Friday night film fest. Popcorn is a great snack choice because it's a whole grain that provides carbohydrates and fiber to the diet and is naturally low in fat

and calories. And for mere pennies per serving it's wallet-friendly too.

For this Italian inspired recipe, Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese is key. Italians savor this as a full-flavored eating cheese, with its granular structure breaking into slivers. Americans tend to think of it as a pasta topping. Whether eaten by the chunk or grated over food there's nothing like the real deal.

Genuine Parmigiano-Reggiano is made following stringent guidelines and comes from a specific designated region of Italy (including Parma, where it gets its name). The region boasts the most ideal land for grazing cattle. Milk is gathered only when the cows have grazed on the freshest grass of the season. The cheese ages for at least 14 months to bring about its fullest flavor, although many age even longer. The presence of small white crystals in the cheese indicates a ripening period of about 24 months. If you don't have real Parmigiano-Reggiano in your refrigerator, splurge on a small piece. You'll be glad you did.

Rosemary Parmigiano-Reggiano Popcorn

Makes: 4 quarts, 16 servings (1 cup each)

- 4 quarts popped popcorn
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 teaspoons finely crushed rosemary (fresh or jarred)
- 1/4 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese (or Parmesan cheese)
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt (or sea salt)
- 1/8 teaspoon white pepper, optional

- Place popcorn in a large serving bowl. Mix butter, olive oil and rosemary together in a small bowl; microwave 20 seconds to melt butter. Stir butter mixture and pour over popcorn; toss.
- Sprinkle cheese, garlic salt and pepper over popcorn; toss again and serve.

