



## What's Important? & Artichoke Crostini

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I'm not one for New Year's resolutions. Maybe it's the contrarian in me. Or maybe the cold, dark days of winter make even the simplest resolution seem insurmountable. Goals are best set when the daffodils are budding with promise or when September's golden sunshine congers up memories of the first day of school.

Maybe you'd like to join me and forget about resolutions ... at least until March when the days are a little warmer and the sun sets around dinnertime instead of mid afternoon. For now, I'm taking inspiration from a friend who recently shared her thoughts on *What's Important?*

From late November through most of December, this lovely woman posed the timeless question on her Facebook page. Her daily, one word answers were couched with a question mark. Wisdom? Hope? Wonder? Friends? Laughter? Grace? The responses were illustrated with wonderful photographs, some old and some new. From sweet grandbabies to fireworks over Pleasant Lake, her photographs captured family, friends and beautiful scenery. On Christmas Day, her one word was marked with a quiet but resounding period. Love. It was a compelling, thought-provoking glimpse at one woman's Advent reflections of what's important.

I'm sure this superb use of social media got all her friends thinking. It did me. Within a week, I knew I would poach her idea. It was only a question of when. And so it's another cold, drab day. The hoopla from the holidays is over. It's a good day to quietly ponder and reflect on *What's Important?*

The list of potential replies is more or less endless. The best part of asking this question is that there are no wrong or right answers. Or limits, you can have many or few replies. You can narrow it down to one. It's all up to you.

You can start with a long list of powerful words and images and whittle it down or begin with one or two and build it up. You can juggle your list from most to not-quite-as important or keep it in no particular order. I'm pretty sure it will change over time but if it changes every week, you may want to reflect a bit more. They're your words, your list, you can share all or part of it if you want. Or you can keep it to yourself.

There is only one rule; you must be honest.

That's the only catch; each and every one of your answers must be genuine and meaningful. Maybe not to the entire world but to you. There are no shoulds and no coulds. It is not a contest to find the reincarnation of Mother Teresa or Horatio Alger. Your only goal is identify the words that represent the values which you practice and hold dear. Not in theory but in your everyday life.

When it comes to my list ... well, there is a whole lot of stuff that falls between sort'a and pretty-darned important. Narrowing it down to what's truly important is tough but for now I think I've got it covered with:

Family. Friendship. Creativity. Writing.  
Cooking. Play. Achievement. Laughter. Books.  
Pleasant Lake. Extra virgin olive oil. Garlic. A  
pinch of chili pepper. Red shoes. A cozy fire. A  
sunny day. Today. The next adventure.

Yes, I cheated and used a phrase or two.

Now it's your turn. What's important to you?

Happy New Year and bon appétit!



*Susan*

### Artichoke Crostini

*In spite of the long list of ingredients, this delicious appetizer can be assembled in minutes. Enjoy!*

Makes about 3 cups



Extra virgin olive oil  
 1 small onion, diced  
 1 small carrot, diced  
 Pinch or to taste chili pepper flakes  
 1/2 teaspoon herbs de Provence  
 Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste  
 1-2 garlic cloves, minced  
 1 teaspoon anchovy paste  
 1/4 cup dry white wine  
 About 12 ounces oil packed artichokes, drained well and cut in slivers  
 About 4 ounces oil packed sundried tomatoes, drained well and chopped  
 1-2 tablespoons capers, drained  
 10-12 oil-cured black olives, pitted and roughly chopped  
 About 4 ounces feta, crumbled  
 Grated zest of 1 lemon  
 Grated zest of 1 orange  
 1-2 tablespoons chopped parsley  
 2-3 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted  
 1 baguette, thinly sliced and toasted or pita bread cut into wedges and toasted

Heat a little olive oil in a large, deep skillet over medium heat. Add the onion, carrot, chili pepper and herbs to the skillet and season with salt and pepper. Cook the vegetables, stirring frequently, until the onion is starts to become translucent, 2-3 minutes. Add the garlic and anchovy paste and cook for another minute. Add the wine and bring to a simmer. Stirring occasionally, simmer until the pan is almost dry, about 5 minutes. Cool.

Put the artichokes, tomatoes, capers and olives in a bowl. Add the onion, carrot and any liquid left in the pan and toss to combine. Let the mixture sit at room temperature for 15-20 minutes or in the refrigerator for up to several hours to combine the flavors.

Combine the feta, lemon and orange zest and parsley in a bowl. If not using immediately, store covered in the refrigerator.

To serve: toss the pine nuts with the artichoke mixture and spoon into a shallow bowl. Sprinkle with the feta and serve with toasted baguette slices or pita wedges. If made in advance, remove the artichoke and feta mixtures from the refrigerator about 30 minutes before serving to take the chill off.



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