



### **Peperonata Crostini with Whipped Ricotta Cheese**

1-1/2 to 2 pounds red peppers, seeded  
5 Tablespoons olive oil, divided  
1-1/2 Tablespoons capers, rinsed, drained  
2 to 4 Tablespoons simple tomato sauce  
2 shallots, peeled, sliced thin  
1 cup diced fresh fennel bulb  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
1/8 teaspoon red pepper flakes or to taste  
2 Tablespoons red wine vinegar

### **Whipped Ricotta**

1 cup whole milk ricotta cheese  
1 Tablespoon heavy cream  
Salt and black pepper to taste  
Crostini or toasted Italian bread as desired  
Garnish: Fresh parsley as desired

**To Roast Peppers:** Preheat oven to 400F degrees.  
Cut peppers into small thin strips to fit bread size. Place on large baking pan; toss with about 3 Tablespoons olive oil to coat peppers.

Bake in oven for 12 minutes; remove; stir peppers; return to oven; bake for additional 10 to 12 minutes or until peppers start to caramelize. Remove from oven; set aside.

In 12-inch skillet, heat 2 Tablespoons oil; add capers; cook briefly; add tomato sauce; stir well; cook out for a few minutes.

Add shallots, fennel, salt, and red pepper flakes; sweat without browning, until tender.

Deglaze pan with vinegar and add peppers. Cook over low heat for 10 to 15 minutes to blend flavors; stir occasionally.

**Prepare Whipped Ricotta:** In a medium sized bowl, whip ricotta with cream; season with salt and black pepper to taste. Set aside.

**To Serve:** Spread a layer of ricotta on each Crostini or bread slice; top each with peperonata; garnish with tiny parsley leaf if desired.

Yield: about 3 cups peperonata

**Recipe inspired by:** David Di Gregorio, Executive Chef, Osteria Via Stato restaurant in Chicago, Illinois Prepared at Chicago Botanic Garden for Garden Chef Series, August 7, 2016.

**Cook's Note:** I used 1/4 cup thicker tomato sauce and cut my pepper slices smaller to fit the bread size. I baked my pepper slices on a foil lined baking pan for about 25 minutes; stirring once. Store remaining peperonata in the refrigerator.

**About the Recipe:** Roasting the red peppers created a rich caramelized flavor and vibrant color. The summer sweet peppers balanced the red wine vinegar, blending the capers, fennel, and shallots. It makes an easy appetizer since it can be prepared ahead of time. I also love the idea that you can use it to top any meat or fish course, and it's perfect for pasta.