



THE LIFE OF THE PARTY

Six steps to everyone's favorite holiday nibble

Holiday entertaining is a balance of effort to outcome. While you could spend the day shut in the kitchen crafting an intricate masterpiece, the results can disappear in a matter of moments when put in front of hungry houseguests. Instead, a recipe that looks impressive but is easy to create

can be your ticket out of the kitchen to spend more time with visiting relatives and friends. Enter the cheese ball, a stress-free appetizer you can prep the night before. Ours uses roasted garlic—make things easy on yourself by picking some up from the grocery store's salad or pickle bar. When combining ingredients with the cream cheese, resist the urge to break out the food processor—you want to retain some texture and avoid overprocessing the mixture. Once your cream cheese is softened, it should be easy to mix in the cheese and herbs by hand. Be cautious when adding extra salt. Since salted almonds will coat the outside, dip one into the mixture to test whether more seasoning is needed. While the cheese ball only needs to chill for two hours to firm up, an overnight rest will allow the flavors to meld more thoroughly before serving. Find a guest that's eager to help and ask them to arrange the almonds in not-so-even concentric rings, staggering the nuts to resemble a pinecone. If you're pressed for time, finely chop almonds and press around the outside of the cheese ball to coat. To serve either option, arrange on a platter with crackers or toasted baguette slices and mix yourself a festive drink.—*Lia Grabowski*

PHOTOS BY JONATHAN BONCEK

TLP's Holiday Cheese Ball

8 ounces cream cheese
8 ounces shredded gruyere
4-5 roasted garlic cloves
2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme

1 teaspoon dry mustard
Kosher salt
2 (6-ounce) cans smoked almonds

1



SOFTEN CREAM CHEESE

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with paddle attachment, or by hand, beat cream cheese until softened.

2



CRUSH GARLIC

Using a fork, mash roasted garlic cloves until they resemble a paste and you have 2 tablespoons.

3



MIX TOGETHER

Add all ingredients except salt and almonds to softened cream cheese and mix well until combined. Check seasoning and add salt if needed.

4



TURN IT OUT

Turn the mixture onto a sheet of plastic wrap. Pull ends of plastic wrap around mixture and twist closed, forming into a ball.

5



REFRIGERATE

Once the mixture is formed into a ball, refrigerate in the plastic wrap for at least 2 hours, preferably overnight to let the flavors meld.

6



TOP AND SERVE

Remove cheese ball from plastic and arrange almonds over surface, starting at the top and working downward in staggered rings to resemble a pinecone. Serve with crackers or toasted baguette.