

BEST NEW CHEFS 2008



Gerard Craft

Niche

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Gerard Craft likes using extremely fresh ricotta cheese for his toasts; his favorite kind is from **Di Palo Selects** in Manhattan. He tops the cheese with sautéed asparagus that tosses with fresh lemon juice, which brightens the flavors considerably.

INGREDIENTS

1. 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling and brushing
2. 8 slices packaged thin white bread
3. 3/4 pound pencil-thin asparagus, cut into 2-inch lengths
4. Salt and freshly ground pepper
5. 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
6. 1/4 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
7. 1/2 cup fresh ricotta (5 ounces)
- 8.

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350° and lightly brush a baking sheet with olive oil. Using a 2-inch round biscuit cutter, stamp 4 rounds out of each slice of bread and transfer to the baking sheet. Lightly brush the rounds with oil and toast for about 15 minutes, until lightly golden and slightly crisp.
2. Meanwhile, in a medium skillet, heat the 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Add the asparagus, season with salt and pepper and cook over high heat, stirring occasionally, until crisp-tender, about 1 minute. Add the lemon juice and let cool slightly.
3. In a small bowl, stir the lemon zest into the ricotta and season with salt and pepper. Spread the lemon ricotta on the toasts and top with the asparagus. Drizzle with oil and sprinkle with salt. Serve right away.