

# Genius Whole Roasted Cauliflower

Today: Cauliflower becomes centerpiece, and a stunning vegetarian main is born.



As you already know, cauliflower takes well to roasting All those clammy, starchy crevices get nutty and sweet and come into their own -- catching oils, crisping, browning, basking.

But here's a twist: you don't even need to floret it first. Like a chicken, a cauliflower is roastable by design.



It's not quite as simple as chucking it in the oven as-is -- although you could do that. People do. But if, instead, you go with chef Alon Shaya's way -- which is nearly as easy -- you can control the seasoning all the way to the core.

"I started making the whole roasted cauliflower two years ago after returning from a trip to Israel." Shaya wrote to me. "Fried cauliflower with yogurt is a very classic dish there. I loved that dish so much that I wanted to recreate it in a way that showed off the beauty of the whole vegetable."

At Shaya's New Orleans restaurant Domenica, this means sous-vide, then an 800° F pizza oven. At home, it's a big pot and whatever oven came in your wall. No matter.



First, you'll make a quick winey, punchy broth.





Once it's hot, lower in your cauliflower to poach for about 15 minutes.





Then you'll dredge it up and set it in a roasting pan. Save that broth too! It could be considered a boozy first course (the vegetarian version of pot-au-feu), or the base to tomorrow's risotto or pasta sauce, or a means for cooking more vegetables or fish.

You might think the thing would have a hard time browning after such a thorough soak, but don't get out the hair dryer yet. The small amounts of olive oil and butter in the poaching liquid are enough to cling to all of the cauliflower's folds and curves, which don't hesitate to brown and crackle up in a hot oven.



Your pale, plain cauliflower is about to come alive. The best part: any spots that are lying flat against the pan go as crisp and bronze as a roast suckling pig. (So make sure you hack the stem down enough to get some of those.)





Meanwhile you'll fluff up a creamy, funky sauce -- it's goat cheese on feta on cream cheese, with a little cream and olive oil to loosen them all up. Shaya explains, "It reminds me of one of my true loves, Israeli labneh."



Now you'll tip over more olive oil and scatter on some hunky salt, then carve it into wedges or break it off limb by limb, dragging each through tides of cheese -- dark crust against clean white, the only reminder of the wallflower it used to be.



## **Whole Roasted Cauliflower and Whipped Goat Cheese**

Serves 4 to 6

Whole Roasted Cauliflower

**2 1/2 cups dry white wine**

**1/3 cup olive oil plus more for serving**

**1/4 cup kosher salt**

**3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**

**2 tablespoons unsalted butter**

**1 tablespoon crushed red pepper flakes**

**1 tablespoon sugar**

**1 bay leaf**

**1 head of cauliflower, stem trimmed and leaves removed**



1. Heat oven to 475° F. Bring wine, oil, salt, lemon juice, butter, red pepper flakes, sugar, bay leaf, and 8 cups water to a boil in a large pot.
2. Carefully lower in cauliflower, reduce heat, and simmer, turning occasionally, until a knife easily inserts into center, 15 to 20 minutes.
3. Using 2 slotted spoons or a mesh strainer or spider, transfer cauliflower to a rimmed baking sheet or roasting pan, draining well.
4. Roast, rotating pan halfway through, until brown all over, 30 to 40 minutes.
5. Transfer cauliflower to a plate. Drizzle with oil; sprinkle with sea salt. Serve with whipped goat cheese (recipe below).

#### Whipped Goat Cheese

**4 ounces fresh goat cheese**

**3 ounces cream cheese**

**3 ounces feta**

**1/3 cup heavy cream**

**2 tablespoons olive oil plus more for serving**

**Coarse sea salt (for serving)**

1. Blend goat cheese, cream cheese, feta, cream, and 2 tablespoons olive oil in a food processor until smooth; season with sea salt.
2. Transfer whipped goat cheese to a serving bowl and drizzle with olive oil. Note: Whipped goat cheese can be made one day ahead.
3. Cover and chill in the refrigerator.