

THE complete  
**ITALIAN**  
**COOKBOOK**



Essential Regional  
Cooking of Italy

MANUELA ANELLI  
MAZZOCCO







*THE* **complete**  
**ITALIAN COOKBOOK**







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Essential Regional Cooking of Italy

**MANUELA ANELLI MAZZOCCO**

*Photography by Thomas J. Story*

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Interior and Cover Designer: Stephanie Mautone

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Photography @ 2020 Thomas J. Story.

Food styling by Alexa Hyman.

ISBN: Print 978-1-64611-417-7 | eBook 978-1-64611-418-4

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**FOR THE BOYS IN MY LIFE:**

my husband, Maurizio, who  
married me before I even knew  
how to make his favorite lasagna  
and has since supported and  
encouraged me to do what I love;  
and my sons, Mathias and Alex,  
who are the best taste-testers a  
mom could ask for.

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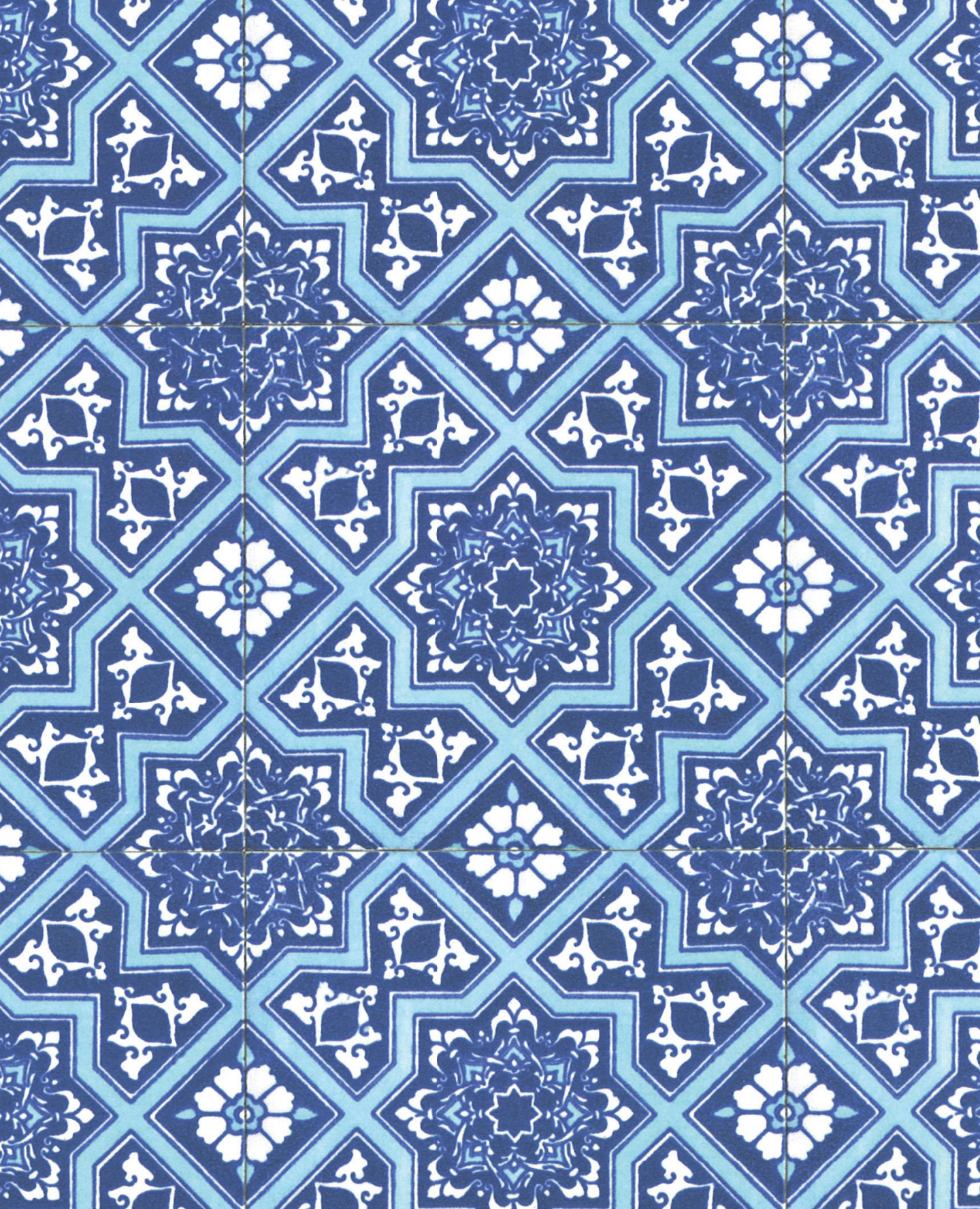
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# CIAO!

**I**t is no secret that most Italians have a love affair with food. Mine officially started in my early 20s after I left my hometown in Italy, along with a brand-new husband, two heavy pieces of luggage (one overflowing with nonstick pots and an espresso maker), and a stolen bible. Well, it wasn't the actual Bible, but an extremely thick Italian cookbook that we borrowed from, and never returned to, my mother-in-law. This book covers everything you'd ever want to know about food and cooking techniques.

Young, in love, and equipped with the essentials for survival, we left our cozy family homes in Venezia to start a new adventure together in the United States. After living for several years in Chicago and Madison, we finally settled down in Los Angeles. What was clear about our first years in the Midwest was that if we ever wanted to enjoy the food from our youth, I had to cook it myself. That's when it all started: I decided to roll up my sleeves and don an apron, sharpen my knives and rev up my blender, and dive deep into the pages of the "bible."

I am not a professionally trained chef, but I know what delicious Italian dishes should be like. It is etched in my taste buds and infused in my genes. I cook every day the same way you do, with no fancy equipment or professional skills. After spending 20 years cooking Italian food and twice as many eating it, I've accumulated a lot of experience. This is what I'd like to share with you in this book: my lifelong knowledge and profound passion for Italian food.

In this book I hope to inspire and show you that with only a little time, a pinch of passion, and a sprinkle of love, you can also create your favorite Italian dishes in your own kitchen to share with your family and friends.







# 1

## THE SIMPLICITY OF ITALIAN CUISINE

I love losing myself in the pure pleasure of cooking. Meal preparation in Italy is a sacred ritual that cannot, and should not, be rushed. It's about shopping every day at the market and searching for high-quality, fresh ingredients. It's about following traditions while at the same time adding lots of love and personal touches. It's about slowing down and taking the time to taste, savor, sip, and munch, all while chatting, gesticulating (very useful, especially when talking with a full mouth!), and catching up on the day's events. It's about getting together, creating connections, and enjoying a homemade meal and one another's company. It's a tradition that I truly cherish and embrace, and one I try my best to pass on to my children.

As you will see in this book, most recipes are not based on elaborate preparations, but on common ingredients and basic methods. And that is because these dishes are deeply rooted in the popular cooking of *massaie* (housewives), *pescatori* (fishermen), *contadini* (farmers), and *cacciatori* (hunters). Their traditions have passed on from kitchen to kitchen, between generations, and through many centuries. With much pride and the fierce passion Italians are known for, this modest cuisine has developed into what is now esteemed as one of the most cherished and well-known around the world. But overall, it's a cuisine that still relies on those same easy techniques and locally produced, seasonal, quality ingredients.

Italian cuisine is renowned not just for its simplicity, but also for its richness of flavors and regional diversity. Even though Italy is a relatively small country—smaller than California and not much bigger than Arizona—it showcases an incredible variety of scenery: from the breathtaking snow-covered Alps in the north to the sun-kissed seashores in the south, and all the colorful and unique historical towns and lush countryside in between. If you've ever traveled through Italy and eaten your way around, I bet you noticed that Italian food varies considerably from region to region, just as much as the beautiful landscape: from cheesy and creamy delicacies in the north to spicy and saucy dishes in the south. But no matter where you are in Italy, you will find some handmade pasta, locally produced gelato, a delightful glass of Chianti wine, and a friendly smile waiting for you.

## Regional Classics

Italy is divided into 20 regions that can be grouped into five main areas: northwest, northeast, central, south, and islands. Each area boasts its own culinary treasures and traditions mostly based on local climate and natural resources.

The northwest part of Italy is a rich and geographically diverse area that offers a picturesque coastline along the Ligurian Sea, ancient castles in the Valle d'Aosta, and blue-water lakes set among beautiful mountains in Lombardy and Piedmont. If you are a cheese lover, this is the place to be. There are several cheeses that originated here, like Grana Padano, Gorgonzola, Taleggio, and Fontina, just to name a few. Lombardy, together with the rest of the Pianura Padana, is also known as the major producer of rice in Italy, exporting several varieties, including the world-famous Arborio



and Carnaroli rices. Truffles and several varieties of mushrooms are easily found in Piedmont; Taggiasca olives and fresh herbs, like the most flavorful basil I'd ever tasted, grow luxuriously along the beautiful Ligurian coastline. It comes as no surprise that some of the most notorious dishes from Northwestern Italy are Risotto with Porcini Mushrooms (page 42), Pesto alla Genovese (page 56), and Rosemary Focaccia Bread (page 87).

The northeast area of Italy encompasses the beautiful regions of Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto, and Emilia-Romagna. This area is as diverse and as rich as its neighboring northern region. Here we can find the most stunning peaks and valleys with lush pastures, not far from the fertile flat plains and alluvial soils that make this the most productive agricultural land of Italy. Rice, mushrooms, polenta, vinegar (like the world-famous *aceto di Modena*), cured meat (*prosciutto di Parma* and a lot more), Parmigiano Reggiano and Asiago cheeses, and a large variety of seafood and shellfish are just some of the products that make this area special and unique. Some of the most popular dishes here are fresh egg pasta like Homemade Egg Tagliatelle Pasta (page 58), Ragù alla Bolognese (page 55), and Capesante Gratinata alla Veneziana (page 15).

Central Italy is a large area that expands from the Tyrrhenian to the Adriatic coast, and includes Tuscany, Marche, Umbria, Lazio, and some of the most spectacular destinations in the world. The hills of the Apennines, also known as the backbone of Italy, run through the middle, with several rivers flowing from there to the sea. So even though there aren't many large plains in Central Italy, the few that exist are very fertile. This area is well known for its finest olive oils, the best artichokes, superior pecorino cheese, and meat dishes. The cuisine of Central Italy is probably the most familiar to Americans with pasta dishes that I bet you've tasted at least once in your life: Cacio e Pepe (page 64), Spaghetti alla Carbonara (page 62), and Pasta all'Amatriciana (page 63). And let's not forget dishes like Ribollita (page 28), and Carciofi alla Romana (page 138), which are also must-trys.

Southern Italy includes the regions of Abruzzo, Molise, Puglia, Campania, Basilicata, and Calabria, and it's blessed with some of the most breathtaking coastline in the world. This area is largely dependent on seafood, agriculture, and tourism. If you've ever spent a week vacationing along the coast of Amalfi, for example, you know exactly what I'm talking about. The most flavorful San Marzano tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, figs, and lemons are found here, thanks to the fertile volcanic soil that characterizes this area. Last summer in Capri I had, by far, the best Caprese Salad (page 31), the most

unforgettable Neapolitan pizza, and the most mouthwatering Impepata di Cozze (page 11) I've ever tasted.

The Islands of Sardinia and Sicily offer the best example of Mediterranean cooking in Italy. This rich and flavorful cuisine has been influenced by the close proximity of North Africa and Greece. The fertile volcanic soil of Sicily and the warm and sunny weather for most of the year are all factors that help produce extra-large eggplants, deeply yellow lemons, and the most aromatic herbs. The islands are also well known for their pistachios, olives, ricotta and pecorino cheeses, and countless species of seafood. Popular dishes are pasta topped with spicy sauces like Pasta alla Norma (page 72), flavorful veggie dishes like Caponata di Melanzane (page 132), and fried delicacies like Arancini (page 8) and Panelle (page 13), just to name a few.

The recipes I selected for this book are, to me, some of the most beloved dishes from various regions of Italy. When reading these recipes and trying them out, please keep in mind that none of these are set in stone. First of all, there are numerous variations to the same recipe, and in many cases not even Italians can agree on which is the "right" one. Second of all, there isn't really a right or a wrong way of cooking (unless you microwave pasta, which—*mamma mia!*—is wrong in so many ways). Don't be afraid of adding or substituting ingredients, or experimenting and trying something different. After all, the way Italians cook is the same way my *mamma* does, and my *nonna* did before her. Not all ingredients are carefully weighed and measured, but they are often added *a occhio* ("by the eye"). Open your eyes and look at the texture, colors, and consistency. Trust the aroma. Let your taste buds and instinct guide you. Cooking is an art, and as such, it should be fun. It should give pleasure to you and those enjoying your creations.

Now, let's roll up our sleeves, put on an apron, and have some fun!

*Buon appetito*



# Regional Map of Italian Cuisine









# 2

## APPETIZERS

*La cena è pronta!* **Dinner is ready!**

**A** traditional Italian meal starts with *antipasti*, which literally translates to “before a meal.” Just like appetizers, antipasti are small dishes that are meant to set the tone for the rest of the dinner, tantalize the taste buds, and stimulate the appetite. They are small enough to leave room for the main dishes, but fun and scrumptious enough to beckon people to the table.

Not every meal in Italy starts with an appetizer, and not every appetizer needs to be complicated and time-consuming to prepare. One of my favorite ways to start a meal when I have guests over is to offer an easy-to-make tray filled with cured meats, various fancy cheeses, savory olives, a couple of the delicious antipasti you will find in this chapter, and some freshly baked focaccia or garlic rolls. After all, there is nothing like the aroma of homemade bread wafting out of the oven and spreading through the house to welcome your guests and get their mouths watering. And I can promise, as soon as they take the first bite, *aperitivo* in hand of course, they will be begging for another dinner invitation.

# Arancini

## Sicilian Rice Balls

PREP TIME: 20 minutes | INACTIVE TIME: 30 minutes | COOK TIME: 40 minutes

*Arancini* are stuffed rice balls traditional to Sicilian cuisine, and are a great way to use leftover risotto. There are several variations to the recipe, but what they all have in common is a golden, crispy bread crumb crust outside and soft rice inside. The most common arancini are served with Ragù alla Bolognese (page 55), fresh mozzarella, and peas. In this recipe I stuff the arancini with just mozzarella cheese, for a lighter, vegetarian version. **MAKES 18 BALLS; 3 BALLS = 1 SERVING**

### VEGETARIAN

4 cups vegetable broth

2 cups arborio rice,  
uncooked

Salt

1 tablespoon

unsalted butter

½ cup freshly grated

Parmesan cheese

1 tablespoon finely  
chopped fresh basil

2 eggs

18 fresh *ciliegine*  
mozzarella (small  
mozzarella balls)

1 cup plain bread crumbs

Vegetable oil for frying

1. In a small saucepan, bring the broth to a boil over high heat. Add the rice and simmer over medium-low heat until the rice is fully cooked and the broth is absorbed. It should take between 18 to 20 minutes. Stir occasionally at first, then more frequently, making sure the rice doesn't stick to the bottom of the pan. If needed, add a little bit of water (or broth) at the end. Salt to taste.
2. Remove the pan from the heat. Add the butter and mix until combined. Transfer to a bowl, and let cool for about 15 minutes.
3. Add the Parmesan cheese, fresh basil, and eggs to the bowl. Mix to combine.
4. Spoon some of the rice mixture onto the palm of one hand. Add one fresh mozzarella *ciliegina* in the middle and cover with another spoonful of the rice mixture. Shape into a ball approximately 2 inches in diameter. Roll the rice ball in plain bread crumbs until well-coated.
5. Use the rest of the rice mixture and mozzarella balls to make more arancini. Let them rest in the refrigerator for 15 minutes.



- 
- 6.** Fill a medium saucepan with oil to a depth of 1 inch and heat over medium-high heat until the oil reaches 350° to 375°F. Fry the rice balls in batches until golden brown, turning them on all sides, for around 5 minutes for each batch. Remove the arancini from the pan with a slotted spatula and let them drain on paper towel. Serve hot.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** If you can't find *cilieGINE* mozzarella, you can buy a regular-size ball of mozzarella and cut it into ¾-inch cubes.

**TROUBLESHOOTING TIP:** If the arancini start to break when frying, you will need to refrigerate them for 15 more minutes before cooking.

# Calamari Fritti

## Fried Calamari

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **15** minutes

These fried calamari (squid) are made just like the Italian tradition asks for: simply coated in flour and fried until golden and perfectly crispy for a full-flavor experience. Serve with lemon wedges and Basic Tomato Sauce (page 54) on the side, if you like, for an appetizer. Or double up the recipe, serve next to a green salad, and make it a delightful dinner. **SERVES 6**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**

**DAIRY-FREE**

1 pound squid tentacles  
and bodies, cleaned  
and patted dry

Vegetable oil for frying

1½ cups all-purpose flour

Salt

1 tablespoon chopped  
fresh parsley

1 lemon, cut into wedges

1. Cut the squid bodies into ½-inch-thick tubes.
2. Fill a heavy large saucepan with oil to a depth of 1 inch and heat the oil over medium-high heat to 350° to 375°F.
3. Working in batches, toss the calamari into the flour to coat on all sides. Shake off the excess flour and carefully add to the hot oil.
4. Fry for 4 to 5 minutes until golden brown. Remove the calamari with a slotted spoon and drain on a paper towel. Sprinkle immediately with salt and the parsley and serve with lemon wedges.

**COOKING TIP:** Check the temperature of the oil with a thermometer or place a wooden spoon in the pan when heating the oil. When you see small bubbles forming around the spoon and it sizzles, the oil is ready.



# Impepata di Cozze

## Peppered Mussels

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **20** minutes

*Impepata di cozze* is a typical appetizer from Campania that requires very few simple and fresh ingredients. Frozen mussels are not recommended. The traditional recipe doesn't call for parsley, but I find it's a nice addition. You can also add a *peperoncino* or two to spice things up. Don't forget to serve it with lemon wedges on the side, and thick slices of grilled bread for *la scarpetta* (soaking up all the sauce with bread). **SERVES 4**

### **30 MINUTES OR LESS**

**DAIRY-FREE**

**GLUTEN-FREE**

2 pounds fresh mussels,  
scrubbed and cleaned

3 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive oil

2 garlic cloves, crushed

1 cup white wine

1 teaspoon freshly  
ground black pepper, or  
more if you'd like

1 tablespoon chopped  
fresh parsley

1 lemon, cut into wedges

Grilled bread

- 1.** In a large pot add the mussels, cover, and cook on high for 4 minutes or until all the shells have opened.
- 2.** In an extra-large pan or skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat and sauté the garlic for 1 minute.
- 3.** Add the mussels, discarding any that have not opened while cooking. Pass their juices through a fine-mesh strainer before adding to the pan.
- 4.** Add the wine and pepper. Cover and cook over medium heat for about 15 minutes.
- 5.** Serve hot with chopped parsley, a drizzle of olive oil, lemon wedges, and grilled bread.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** To clean the mussels: Discard any mussels that have a broken shell. Clean the rest under running water, scrubbing the shells if necessary, and remove the fuzzy beard by holding it between your thumb and a knife, pulling carefully.

# *Carciofi alla Giudea*

## Roman-Style Fried Artichokes

PREP TIME: 5 minutes | COOK TIME: 15 minutes

These traditional Roman artichokes are made by pressing them down during frying, turning them into a flower-shaped, crispy, and tasty appetizer. For a quicker and easier recipe, cut the artichokes into quarters before frying. **SERVES 4**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**

**DAIRY-FREE**

**GLUTEN-FREE**

**VEGAN**

4 globe artichokes,  
cleaned and trimmed  
Vegetable oil for frying  
Salt

1. Gently open the artichoke leaves with your fingers, pressing the artichoke top-down on the counter until it opens.
2. In a pan that can hold 1 to 2 artichokes at a time, heat the oil to 350°F. Use enough oil to cover the artichoke heads during frying.
3. Fry the artichokes face-down, pressing them down with a wooden spoon or a lid to flatten them out, for 6 to 7 minutes. Turn them to the side to cook the stem.
4. Drain the artichokes on a paper towel. Sprinkle immediately with salt and serve.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** To clean fresh artichokes: Rub your hands with lemon juice, or wear kitchen gloves to protect your fingers from turning brown. Working on one artichoke at a time, trim and discard about ½ inch of the dry stem end. Using a sharp knife or peeler, shave off the hard, outer layer of the remaining stem. Remove the thick outer leaves until you get to the lighter-green leaves inside; cut the tips of the inner leaves, removing 1 to 1½ inches. Remove the inner fuzzy choke from the center using a carving knife. Place the center of the artichoke under running water, and with a small spoon scrape the remaining fuzz. If you are not frying the artichoke immediately, place in a bowl filled with water and the juice of half a lemon in order to prevent browning.



# Panelle

## Sicilian Chickpea Fritters

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 30 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 30 minutes

*Panelle* are a traditional Sicilian snack or appetizer. These fritters are made with chickpea flour cooked into a polenta, cut into wedges when cold, and fried until golden and puffy. You can make the chickpea polenta ahead of time, and keep it cool until you're ready to fry and serve. *Panelle* are pretty easy to fry (no splatters!) and only take a few minutes per side. **SERVES 6**

**GLUTEN-FREE**  
**VEGETARIAN**

3 cups water  
1 teaspoon salt  
2 cups chickpea flour  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
1 tablespoon chopped  
fresh parsley  
Vegetable oil for frying  
2 tablespoons freshly  
grated pecorino cheese  
1 lemon, cut into wedges

1. In a large saucepan, bring 3 cups salted water to a boil over high heat. Reduce the flame to medium-low and pour in the chickpea flour while stirring continuously.
2. Mix the polenta often while it simmers and make sure it doesn't stick to the bottom of the pan. The polenta is ready when it starts to come away from the sides of the pan, about 15 minutes. Season with pepper and the parsley. Season with salt, if necessary. Mix well.
3. Spread the polenta on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Flatten it out to make a thin layer about 1/8 inch thick. Let it cool completely for a half hour or longer.
4. Cut the polenta into shapes. Any size works, though I like to cut mine into 1½-by-2½-inch wedges.
5. Fill a large pan with oil to a depth of 1/2 inch and heat the oil over medium-high heat to 350°F. Working in batches, fry the *panelle* for 2 minutes per side, or until lightly golden and puffy. Drain on a paper towel.
6. Place on a serving plate, sprinkle with the cheese, and serve with lemon wedges.

# *Polenta e Gamberetti*

## Salad Shrimp over Creamy Polenta

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **10** minutes

Soft and creamy polenta has always been one of my favorites. When combined with savory shrimp, it's even better. For this recipe I use instant polenta flour for the easiest and quickest appetizer that will surely impress your guests. You are welcome to use Basic Polenta (page 49). **SERVES 4**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**

**DAIRY-FREE**

Salt

12 ounces cooked salad

shrimp, fresh or frozen

2 garlic cloves, sliced

2 tablespoons chopped  
fresh parsley

¼ cup extra-virgin olive  
oil, plus 1 tablespoon

1 cup instant  
polenta flour

1. Bring a small pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Add the shrimp and boil for no more than 1 minute. If the shrimp are frozen, make sure they are completely defrosted first. Drain well.
2. In a small bowl, mix the garlic, parsley, and ¼ cup of the olive oil. Mix in the shrimp.
3. In a medium saucepan, boil 3 cups of salted water. Add the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil. Reduce the flame to low and pour the polenta flour, stirring continuously. Let simmer for a couple of minutes until it thickens.
4. Divide the polenta equally among 4 plates. Make a small well in the polenta and fill with the shrimp mixture, dividing it equally among the 4 plates.



# Capesante Gratinata alla Veneziana

## Venetian-Style Baked Sea Scallops

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 15 minutes

Most fish markets in Venezia sell sea scallops in their shells, but this is not often the case in the United States. If you can find sea scallops in shells, use the shells to bake and serve the sea scallops for the prettiest presentation. If not, use individual-size ovenware dishes. Either way, this is an appetizer with a wow factor. There's no need to share with your guests how quick and easy this recipe is; it will be our secret! **SERVES 4**

### 30 MINUTES OR LESS

8 large sea scallops  
2 tablespoons chopped  
fresh parsley  
1 garlic clove, chopped  
¼ cup plain bread crumbs  
1 tablespoon  
freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese  
Salt  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
3 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive  
oil, divided

1. If you have the scallop shells, make sure to scrape and wash them thoroughly. Rinse and dry the scallops.
2. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
3. In a bowl, mix the parsley, garlic, bread crumbs, Parmesan cheese, a pinch of salt and pepper, and 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. Keep the mixture crumbly and don't pack it.
4. Place two sea scallops in each serving dish or shell. Season with salt and pepper, sprinkle with the bread mixture, and drizzle with the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil.
5. Bake in the upper part of the oven for about 15 minutes, or until golden and fully cooked.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** When you mince the garlic and parsley together you will end up with a nice, even mixture with same-size pieces and full flavor.

# Traditional Bruschetta with Fresh Tomatoes

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **10** minutes

Here is a recipe for a basic bruschetta with tomatoes and basil. As with many recipes in this book, you can adapt it to your own taste and available ingredients. You can add fresh mozzarella, pesto sauce, grilled zucchini, avocado . . . let your imagination take control, and have fun with it. **SERVES 4**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**

**DAIRY-FREE**

**VEGAN**

4 fresh tomatoes, diced

Salt

Freshly ground

black pepper

4 tablespoons

extra-virgin olive  
oil, divided

5 leaves fresh basil

8 slices crusty Italian  
bread, about

$\frac{3}{4}$  inch thick

1 garlic clove

- 1.** In a bowl, season the tomatoes with salt, pepper, and 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. Tear the basil into pieces and add it to the bowl. Toss the mixture and let sit while you prepare the bread.
- 2.** Drizzle the bread with the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil on both sides. Heat a grill pan (or skillet) on medium-high, and toast the bread on both sides, until golden and crunchy on the outside but still soft on the inside.
- 3.** Cut the garlic clove in half and brush the slices of bread with the cut part of the garlic. Top with the tomatoes and serve.

# Crostini with Prosciutto and Burrata

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **10** minutes

Toasted bread topped with prosciutto di Parma and extra-creamy burrata cheese make a mouthwatering two-bite finger food perfect to get any party started. Top with sun-dried tomatoes and arugula for some tang and spiciness. **SERVES 4**

## **30 MINUTES OR LESS**

**12 baguette slices, ½ inch thick and cut diagonally**  
**2 tablespoons olive oil**  
**½ cup balsamic vinegar**  
**8 ounces burrata cheese**  
**2 tablespoons sun-dried tomatoes in oil, drained (optional)**  
**2 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto di Parma**  
**1 cup arugula**

- 1.** Preheat the oven to 400°F. Lightly brush the bread slices with the oil on both sides. Arrange in a single layer on a baking sheet and bake for 5 minutes or until lightly toasted.
- 2.** In a small pan, bring the vinegar to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes or until the vinegar thickens and is reduced by half. Set aside.
- 3.** Cut the burrata into 12 pieces. Spread the burrata on top of each crostini and top with sun-dried tomatoes, if using, about ½ slice of prosciutto, a few leaves of arugula, and a drizzle of the balsamic reduction. Serve immediately.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Sun-dried tomatoes, or *pomodorini secchi*, are a fun and versatile ingredient that I always like to have in my pantry. They were originally made in Southern Italy by farmers during the summer. Ripe tomatoes were dried on their rooftops and preserved in oil to use all year long. Extra-flavorful and so versatile, sun-dried tomatoes can be used in salad, pizza, or pasta.



# Mozzarella in Carrozza

## Venetian Fried Mozzarella Sandwiches

PREP TIME: **15** minutes | COOK TIME: **15** minutes

*Mozzarella in carrozza* (mozzarella in a carriage) is one of my favorite *cicchetti*, small snack or finger food served by traditional *bacari*, rustic little restaurants in Venezia. Mozzarella in carrozza is originally from Naples, but Venice changed up the recipe and made it its own. In Southern Italy, the mozzarella sandwich is dipped in flour and egg wash (I've seen bread crumbs, too) and fried. In Venezia, we dip it in a *pastella* (thick batter made with flour, milk, and eggs), add one anchovy fillet in the middle for an extra layer of indulgence, and fry. Serve it hot and melty on the inside, and eat as fast as you can! **SERVES 4**

### 30 MINUTES OR LESS

1¼ cups all-purpose flour

Salt

1 egg

1 cup milk

8 slices bread

2 (4-ounce) mozzarella balls, cut into 8 thick slices each

8 anchovy fillets (optional)

Vegetable oil for frying

1. In a bowl, mix the flour, a pinch of salt, and the egg. Whisk in the milk gradually until smooth. Add enough milk to make a dense, pancake-like batter. Adjust with a little more milk if necessary.
2. Remove the crust from the bread only if it's crunchy. Cut the bread slices in half; each half should be slightly larger than the mozzarella slice. Cut to size if necessary.
3. Assemble the sandwiches, by adding a thick slice of mozzarella with one anchovy fillet on top. Press the edges of the bread together to seal.
4. In a large sauté pan or skillet over medium-high heat, heat enough oil to cover the bottom of the pan. When the oil is hot, dip each sandwich in the batter and immediately place it in the pan. Fry on both sides for 2 minutes or until golden. Remove from the pan, drain on paper towels, and enjoy while still hot.

**VARIATION TIP:** If you don't like anchovies, try adding a half slice of ham or just use the mozzarella on its own.

# Frittata alle Cipolle

## Onion Frittata

PREP TIME: 5 minutes | COOK TIME: 20 minutes

A frittata is an easy and versatile egg dish that can be served for brunch, sliced up as an appetizer, or served with a green salad for a weeknight *secondo piatto*. It's a great way to use up small amounts of leftovers and transform them into something exquisite. You can cook a frittata on the stovetop, or you can start it on the stovetop and finish cooking it in the oven, so there is no chance of breaking the frittata when flipping it. Both options are below. **SERVES 4**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**  
**GLUTEN-FREE**  
**VEGETARIAN**

6 eggs  
1 cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese  
½ teaspoon salt, plus  
more for seasoning  
½ teaspoon freshly  
ground black pepper  
3 tablespoons olive oil  
1 large onion, cut in half  
and thinly sliced

1. In a large bowl, combine the eggs, Parmesan cheese, salt and pepper. Beat well with a whisk or fork.
2. In a large nonstick 10-inch oven-safe sauté pan or skillet, heat the oil over medium heat for 1 minute. Add the onion and a pinch of salt and sauté for 2 minutes, mixing often. Lower the heat and cook for 5 more minutes.
3. Add the beaten eggs. Cover the pan and cook over low-medium heat for 4 minutes.
4. Option 1: Flip the frittata by covering the pan with a large plate or lid and flip. Slide the frittata back into the skillet to cook the other side. Cook for another couple of minutes. Option 2: Place the ovenproof skillet in the upper part of a preheated 400°F oven. Bake for 4 minutes or until golden brown.
5. Slide the frittata onto a plate, cut into wedges, and serve.

**VARIATION TIP:** When adding other vegetables to the frittata, make sure to cook them until crisp-tender before adding the eggs.

# *Frittata di Spaghetti*

## Neapolitan Spaghetti Frittata

PREP TIME: 5 minutes | COOK TIME: 20 minutes

Did you cook way too much spaghetti for dinner? Even though most Italians would not reheat pasta the following day, there are ways to turn the leftovers into something delectable. This recipe works well with plain pasta, or pasta that has been dressed with a very simple sauce. My first choice is thick spaghetti, but you are welcome to try it with any pasta shape you have. You can serve it as an appetizer (serving 6 to 8), a main entrée, or a secondo piatto (serving 4) next to a green salad. **SERVES 6 TO 8**

### **30 MINUTES OR LESS** **VEGETARIAN**

5 eggs

½ cup whole milk

½ cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese

Salt

Freshly ground  
black pepper

4 cups leftover cooked  
thick spaghetti

4 ounces fresh mozzarella  
cheese, diced

1 tablespoon chopped  
fresh basil

3 tablespoons olive oil,  
plus more if needed

- 1.** In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk, Parmesan cheese, and a pinch each of salt and pepper.
- 2.** Add the leftover spaghetti, mozzarella, and basil. Toss to combine.
- 3.** In a 9-inch nonstick sauté pan or skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the pasta mixture and spread evenly.
- 4.** Cook for 1 minute over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover the pan, and cook for 5 minutes or until golden brown on the bottom.
- 5.** Loosen the edges with a wooden spoon. Using a large flat plate or the lid of the pan, carefully invert the frittata onto the plate or lid. Watch out for possible spills when inverting.



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- 6.** Add 1 tablespoon olive oil to the pan (if needed) and slide the frittata back. Cook uncovered for another 5 minutes or until golden on the bottom. Transfer to a serving plate, cut into wedges, and serve.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** If you don't have leftover spaghetti, cook 12 ounces uncooked thick spaghetti until *al dente*, drain, toss right away with a tablespoon olive oil, and let cool for 10 minutes before continuing with the recipe.



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# 3

## SOUPS AND SALADS

**S**oups are one of the few reasons why I look forward to cold winter nights. In Italy they are served instead of pasta or risotto as *primo piatto*. I'd say soups are the healthiest comfort food you can find. And whether these hearty and cozy soups are smooth or chunky, rich with earthy vegetables or wholesome cereals, pasta, or bread, they are sure to fill your stomach and warm your soul. Once you try some of the recipes in this chapter, I bet you won't wait for a wintry night to make them again.

Salads are the best way to turn the season's flavorful vegetables into a delicious side or main dish. In this chapter I include not just green salads, but some filling recipes that make the perfect light lunch or dinner. Each recipe includes a simple dressing, but you are welcome to use your own. Just remember not to overdress your salad, and wait until the last minute to add the dressing and toss. Italian dressing is actually very simple: 2 parts extra-virgin olive oil to 1 part wine vinegar whisked together with salt and pepper. The ingredients are generally drizzled and sprinkled directly over the salad right before tossing and serving. It's as easy as that!



# *Pasta e Fagioli alla Veneta*

## Venetian-Style Beans and Pasta Soup

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 12 hours | **COOK TIME:** 2 hours

*Pasta e fagioli* (or *fasioi* as we call them in Venice) is a traditional peasant dish made with inexpensive and readily available ingredients. This soup is historically linked to celebrating Sant'Antonio Abate, when on the seventeenth of January pigs would get sacrificed for the feast. The rich would get the prime cuts of meat, and the farmers would use the remaining parts to make this dish. I will show you how to prepare *pasta e fagioli* the Venetian way, or the way I grew up eating this dish. The most common pasta is large *pappardelle* cut in pieces, but choose your favorite. You can omit the pancetta for a vegetarian alternative. **SERVES 4**

### DAIRY-FREE

10 ounces dried beans  
(borlotti, cannellini, or  
red kidney)  
1 onion, quartered, plus  
1 onion, chopped  
3 tablespoons olive oil,  
divided, plus more  
for serving  
1 small carrot, chopped  
3 ounces pancetta or  
bacon, chopped  
1 rosemary sprig  
1 medium potato, peeled  
and cut into cubes  
Salt  
2½ ounces dry pasta  
Freshly ground  
black pepper

1. In a large bowl, soak the beans in warm water for at least 12 hours. Drain the beans in a colander and rinse under running water. In a large pot, combine the beans, quartered onion, and 10 cups water. Simmer the beans for 2 hours or until tender. Discard the onion and reserve the bean broth.
2. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the chopped onion, carrot, pancetta, rosemary, and potato. Sauté for 5 minutes while stirring.
3. Add the beans, bean broth, and simmer for 20 minutes. Check occasionally and add more broth if needed. With a slotted spoon, remove about half of the beans and set aside.

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4. Discard the rosemary, and with an immersion blender, blend the soup until smooth. Season with salt to taste. Return the whole beans to the pot and add the pasta.
  5. Cook the pasta, stirring occasionally. Season with salt, if necessary. Serve with a drizzle of olive oil.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Traditionally this soup is made with dried beans, but you can opt for canned, which cuts the cook time down to 30 minutes. Substitute the 10 ounces of dried beans with 2 (14.5-ounce) cans of beans, drained and rinsed, and skip step 1. Purée the beans from one can and leave the other beans whole. Substitute low-sodium vegetable broth for the bean broth.

# Minestrone Soup

PREP TIME: **20** minutes | COOK TIME: **40** minutes

Minestrone is probably the most famous Italian soup. Each region of Italy has its favorite way of making it. When making minestrone, let your pantry and refrigerator tell you what you should add. You can add some pancetta with the *soffritto*, and pasta at the end. You can also purée the minestrone to make a thicker soup and serve it with crostini. **SERVES 4 TO 6**

## GLUTEN-FREE VEGETARIAN

2 tablespoons olive oil,  
plus more for serving  
1 medium onion, diced  
1 carrot, chopped  
2 celery stalks, chopped  
Salt  
1 medium potato, peeled  
and chopped  
1 large zucchini, chopped  
1 cup sliced green beans  
(1-inch pieces)  
1 cup finely chopped  
fresh tomatoes or  
canned petite  
diced tomatoes  
4 cups water or broth  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
½ teaspoon  
dried oregano  
1 (14-ounce) can borlotti  
or cannellini beans,  
drained and rinsed  
1 cup baby spinach  
¼ cup grated  
Parmesan cheese

1. In a large sauté pan or skillet, heat the oil on medium-high and add the onion, carrot, and celery. Sprinkle with a pinch of salt and sauté for 3 minutes.
2. Add the potato, zucchini, and green beans and cook for 3 more minutes.
3. Add the tomatoes and 4 cups water (or broth, if you prefer). Season with salt and pepper to taste, and the oregano.
4. Bring to a boil, cover the pan, and cook for 15 minutes over medium-low heat.
5. Add the beans and baby spinach and simmer for 10 minutes, or until all the veggies are cooked. Season with salt, if necessary. Serve with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil and the Parmesan cheese.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** For this recipe I used canned beans to reduce the cooking time, but you are welcome to use dry beans. Follow the instructions on how to soak and cook dried beans in *Pasta e Fagioli alla Veneta* on page 24.

**STORAGE TIP:** Minestrone is one of those dishes that taste even better the following day.



# Pasta e Ceci

## Chickpeas and Pasta Soup

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **20** minutes

*Pasta e ceci* is a classic Italian recipe, but like many Italian dishes, there isn't just one way to make it. All regional variations start with an onion/celery/carrot soffritto sautéed in olive oil, to which chickpeas and herbs are added. Some pasta e ceci are very dense (more like pasta with some chickpeas) and some are very brothy (more like a soup with a little pasta). What I like is something right in between: creamy and dense, with just the right amount of pasta. My secret is to purée half the chickpeas, which thickens the soup, and leave the rest of the chickpeas whole. Add the broth, and then cook the pasta in the soup. For this recipe I use canned chickpeas so it's ready in only 30 minutes. **SERVES 4**

### **30 MINUTES OR LESS** **VEGETARIAN**

1 tablespoon olive oil, plus  
more for serving

½ medium onion, chopped

1 carrot, chopped

1 celery stalk, chopped

1 garlic clove, crushed

1 rosemary sprig

2 (15.5-ounce) cans  
chickpeas, drained  
and rinsed

4 cups vegetable  
broth, divided

Salt

Freshly ground  
black pepper

4 ounces pasta (ditalini  
or linguine cut in pieces)

Freshly grated Parmesan  
cheese for serving

1. In a large saucepan, heat the oil over medium-high heat and sauté the onion, carrot, celery, garlic, and rosemary sprig for about 5 minutes or until tender.
2. Drain and rinse the chickpeas and purée half of them with ½ cup of the broth. Add the puréed chickpeas to the pan with the remaining whole chickpeas and 3½ cups broth. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
3. Stir and cook over medium heat for 10 minutes, until the soup becomes a little denser.
4. Add the pasta and cook until al dente, stirring occasionally. It should take about 9 minutes, but it depends on the pasta you are using.
5. Serve with Parmesan cheese and a drizzle of olive oil if you like.

# Ribollita

## Tuscan Kale and Bread Soup

**PREP TIME:** 15 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 1 hour | **COOK TIME:** 45 minutes

This classic Tuscan hearty soup is perfect for the winter months. *Ribollita*, which means “boiled twice,” was traditionally made with leftover soup that was reheated the following day with the addition of stale bread. Now made fresh, this soup is a staple in Tuscan cuisine. The traditional recipe asks for dried beans, but I use canned beans here. You can substitute the canned beans with 5 ounces of dried cannellini beans. Follow the instructions on how to soak and cook dried beans in *Pasta e Fagioli alla Veneta* on page 24. **SERVES 4**

**DAIRY-FREE**  
**VEGAN**

2 tablespoons olive oil,  
plus more for serving  
½ onion, chopped  
1 carrot, chopped  
1 celery stalk, minced  
1 garlic clove, crushed  
1 thyme sprig  
Salt  
1 medium potato, diced  
2 bunches (about  
12 ounces total)  
lacinato kale  
1 (14.5-ounce) can  
cannellini beans,  
drained and rinsed  
1 tablespoon  
tomato paste  
4 cups water  
8 ounces rustic  
whole-wheat bread

1. In a large pan, heat the oil on medium heat and add the onion, carrot, celery, garlic, thyme, and a pinch of salt and sauté for 5 minutes, stirring often. Add the potato and cook for 5 more minutes.
2. Prepare the kale by removing the thicker part of the rib, cutting it in half lengthwise, and then into 1-inch slices. Add the kale to the pan, along with the beans, tomato paste, and 4 cups water. Salt to taste (about 1 teaspoon) and bring to a boil.
3. Cover the pan and simmer on medium-low for 25 minutes. Remove the garlic and thyme.
4. Toast the bread, if fresh. Cut it into large chunks and add it to the soup. Simmer for 5 minutes and remove it from the heat.
5. Let the soup sit for at least 1 hour, or overnight per tradition, stored in the refrigerator.
6. Reheat the soup and bring it to a boil. Simmer for a couple of minutes and serve topped with a drizzle of olive oil.

# Passatelli in Brodo

## Homemade Passatelli Pasta in Broth from Emilia

PREP TIME: 5 minutes | COOK TIME: 10 minutes

Soup doesn't get any easier than this! This warm and soothing traditional soup comes from Emilia. It would require a *ferro per passatelli*, which is a special metal disk that is used to make this *passatelli* pasta. But you can also use an old fashion *schiacciapate* (potato ricer) to get this thick and short pasta squeezed right into the broth. **SERVES 4**

### 30 MINUTES OR LESS

6 cups beef broth

3 eggs

½ cup freshly grated

Parmesan cheese

½ teaspoon

grated nutmeg

Salt

1 cup plain bread crumbs

1. In a large pan, bring the beef broth to a boil over medium-high heat.
2. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, whisk the eggs.
3. Add the Parmesan cheese, nutmeg, and a pinch of salt. Mix with a fork.
4. Add the bread crumbs a little at a time while mixing. It should make a soft but firm mixture that is slightly sticky and not too packed.
5. Once the broth is boiling, add some of the mixture to a potato ricer and press it directly into the broth. Work in batches.
6. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 5 minutes.
7. Divide the soup among four bowls and top with more Parmesan cheese if desired.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** You can use any broth you like, though homemade would be preferable. You can also add 1 teaspoon freshly grated lemon zest with the nutmeg.



# Zuppa d'Orzo

## Barley Soup from Alto Adige

PREP TIME: 15 minutes | COOK TIME: 45 minutes

Hearty and warm, this *zuppa d'orzo*, a staple of Northern Italian cuisine, is loaded with vegetables and nutritious barley. Key ingredients for this recipe are barley and speck. Make sure not to confuse “orzo” with the small pasta shape with the same name. **SERVES 4**

1 tablespoon butter  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 medium onion, diced  
1 carrot, diced  
1 celery stalk, diced  
Salt  
1 thyme sprig  
4 ounces speck (or  
smoked pancetta or  
bacon), diced  
1 small potato, peeled  
and diced  
1 cup barley, uncooked  
4 cups beef or  
chicken broth  
Freshly grated Parmesan  
cheese for serving

1. In a large pan or Dutch oven, melt the butter in the olive oil over medium-high heat and sauté the onion, carrot, celery, and a pinch of salt for 2 minutes.
2. Add the thyme, speck, potato, and barley and cook for 2 more minutes.
3. Add the broth, cover the pan, bring to a boil, and simmer over medium-low heat for 45 minutes or until the barley is tender. Make sure to check and add more water or broth as needed. The soup should be thick but still a little brothy.
4. Serve with grated Parmesan cheese on the side.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Speck is a cured meat native to Alto Adige that looks similar to the well-known prosciutto. It's dry-cured ham, flavored with spices like juniper, rosemary, and bay leaves, slowly smoked and aged for at least 6 months. Just like prosciutto, it can be cut in thin slices and used in sandwiches or pizza. For this recipe, speck should be cut in a thick slice and cubed. If you can't find speck, you can substitute smoked pancetta or bacon. Or for a vegetarian variation, omit the speck and use vegetable broth. The result is still very flavorful.

**COOKING TIP:** You can use a pressure cooker for this recipe to cut down the cooking time. In step 3 you should need just 15 to 20 minutes for the barley to become tender.

# Caprese Salad

**PREP TIME:** 5 minutes

The best mozzarella I ever tasted was last summer in Capri. That freshly made *mozzarella di bufala* together with flavorful tomatoes and sweet basil made the tastiest salad. Maybe it was the view from the terrazzo, or the sea breeze, but this simple yet amazing salad was one of the most unforgettable meals of the vacation. Simple dishes like this are only as good as the ingredients you use. So, make sure to find high-quality products, from the fresh mozzarella to the tomatoes and basil to high-quality extra-virgin olive oil. Prepare this salad right before serving, next to a fresh or grilled slice of bread. **SERVES 4**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**

**GLUTEN-FREE**

**VEGETARIAN**

2 (8-ounce) balls fresh  
mozzarella

2 large heirloom or  
vine-ripe tomatoes

Salt

1 small bunch fresh basil

Freshly ground  
black pepper

2 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive oil

1. Slice the mozzarella and tomatoes into  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick slices. Sprinkle the tomatoes with salt to taste.
2. Arrange on a platter alternating with cheese, tomatoes, and basil leaves. You can leave the basil leaves as is or tear them into pieces to release their flavor.
3. Sprinkle with pepper and drizzle with the olive oil.

**VARIATION TIP:** You can make this recipe more fun by creating small caprese bites. Cube the ingredients and thread them on toothpicks.

# Radicchio, Arugula, and Shaved Fennel Salad with Anchovy Vinaigrette

PREP TIME: **10** minutes

Crispy, fresh, and appetizing. Who would have thought that salad could taste this good? And if you are in the mood for something scrumptious, add a teaspoon or two of fried capers on top. Simply drop them in a little hot oil for a minute or until crispy. It's a great topping for any salad. **SERVES 6**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**

**DAIRY-FREE**

**GLUTEN-FREE**

1 fennel bulb

1 small head radicchio

4 packed cups

baby arugula

3 anchovy fillets

¼ cup extra-virgin

olive oil

2 tablespoons white

wine vinegar

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

Salt

Freshly ground

black pepper

1. Cut the fennel and the *radicchio* in half lengthwise. Core and thinly slice. Combine them in a large salad bowl with the arugula.
2. Cut the anchovy fillets in small pieces and crush in a mortar or with a fork to form a paste.
3. In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, vinegar, mustard, about ½ teaspoon salt, and a pinch of pepper until smooth.
4. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss well until coated. Season to taste with salt and pepper if necessary.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Radicchio is a leafy vegetable with white-veined red leaves. It has a spicy and slightly bitter taste. It can be used raw in a salad, or cooked. It comes in two varieties: round and about the size of a grapefruit, or radicchio of Treviso, which has a more elongated shape, similar to the Belgian endive. Both can be used in this recipe.

**VARIATION TIP:** Feel free to use a simple vinaigrette made with just olive oil, vinegar, salt, and pepper, for a vegan dressing.



# Caponata di Tonno

## Neapolitan Tuna, Tomato, and Bread Salad

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 10 minutes to 1 hour |  
**COOK TIME:** 15 minutes

This dish is also known as the *colazione dei pescatori* (fishermen's breakfast), because this is what the seamen carried along with them. After fishing they would combine the salad with their hands in a bowl. The traditional recipe calls for *fresella* bread, which is a toasted bagel-shaped multigrain bread. It's not a fresh bread, so it would be easy to carry along on their trips. As per tradition, you, too, can make this salad using just your hands. Because it's hard to find this bread in the United States, I use a crusty whole-wheat loaf cut into extra-thick slices. **SERVES 4**

### 30 MINUTES OR LESS

12 ounces crusty bread,  
whole-wheat or  
multigrain, cut into  
1-inch-thick slices  
12 ounces cherry  
tomatoes on the vine  
Salt  
5 fresh basil leaves  
¼ teaspoon dried  
oregano (optional)  
¼ cup extra-virgin olive  
oil plus more if needed  
1 ounce green olives  
1 ounce black olives  
10 ounces tuna in olive  
oil, drained  
2 cups packed  
baby arugula

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and toast the slices of bread in the upper part of the oven for 12 to 15 minutes, flipping halfway. Let the bread cool down to room temperature. If you are using already toasted bread for this recipe, you will need to wet the bread with a little water to soften it.
2. Halve the tomatoes and transfer them to a salad bowl. Season with salt, torn basil, and dried oregano, if using, and drizzle with the oil.
3. Cut the bread in bite-size chunks, add to the tomatoes, and toss.
4. Add the olives and the tuna, drained from the oil. Let the salad sit for 10 minutes, or up to 1 hour, so the bread absorbs the flavors. Add the baby arugula just before serving. Season with salt and olive oil if necessary, then toss and serve.

# *Insalata di Finocchi e Arance*

## Sicilian Fennel and Orange Salad

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes

Originally from Sicily, this salad is fresh and crunchy, simple and flavorful. Try it with a few leaves of fresh mint for a fresh and summery flavor. It's amazing either way! **SERVES 4**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**  
**DAIRY-FREE**  
**GLUTEN-FREE**  
**VEGAN**

3 medium fennel bulbs,  
trimmed and thinly  
sliced, a few fronds  
reserved for garnish  
if desired

Salt

Freshly ground

black pepper

2 large oranges

½ cup pitted oil-cured

black olives

3 tablespoons

extra-virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon fresh

lemon juice

1. In a salad bowl, season the fennel with salt and pepper and toss to combine.
2. Trim the oranges by slicing the top and bottom off with a sharp knife. Shave off the peel with the knife, removing all the white pith and keeping only the flesh. Slice the orange horizontally into thin rounds.
3. Add the oranges and olives to the salad bowl. Drizzle with the oil and lemon juice. Toss and serve garnished with bits of fennel frond, if you like.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** When buying fennel, look for small to medium bulbs that are free of bruises or cuts. The bulb should be nice and firm and the fronds bright and green.

# Panzanella

## Tuscan Bread and Tomato Salad

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 1 hour and 10 minutes

Panzanella is a staple of Tuscan cuisine. This recipe lets you transform leftover bread (*pane*, from which the dish takes its name) into an appetizing fresh salad, perfect for the summer season. If you only have fresh bread, cut it into 1-inch-thick slices and bake at 350°F for 10 minutes, then cool before using. **SERVES 4**

**DAIRY-FREE**  
**VEGAN**

1 medium red onion,  
thinly sliced  
2 tablespoons white wine  
vinegar, divided  
1 garlic clove  
8 ounces crusty bread,  
2 days old, cut in to  
4 slices  
4 ripe tomatoes, cut in  
1-inch cubes  
1 cucumber, peeled and  
thinly sliced  
Salt  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
12 fresh basil leaves, torn  
3 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive oil

1. Submerge the onion in a bowl with water and 1 tablespoon of the vinegar. Let it rest for 1 hour.
2. Cut the garlic clove in half, and brush the bread slices with the cut side.
3. In a large bowl, mix a cup (or more if needed) of water and the remaining 1 tablespoon vinegar. Add the bread slices and let rest for about 10 minutes or until the bread is softer.
4. Drain the onion well. In a salad bowl, combine the tomatoes, cucumbers, and onion. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.
5. Squeeze the extra water out of the bread and break (or cut) it into 1-inch pieces. Add to the bowl, then add the basil. Drizzle with the oil and toss.
6. If you can, let rest in the refrigerator for 1 hour. Remove from the refrigerator 15 minutes before serving.

**VARIATION TIP:** Add some Taggiasca or kalamata olives, and/or fresh mozzarella or scamorza cheese for a variation. Not authentic, but still delicious.

# Farro Salad

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 10 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 25 minutes

This farro salad is a great one-dish meal to take along on a picnic or to pack for lunch. Farro is such a versatile ingredient, just like rice and pasta, with a chewy texture and nutty flavor. It comes in two varieties: whole farro and pearled farro. Whole farro needs to be rinsed and soaked before cooking, and it takes 1 hour to boil; pearled farro doesn't need soaking and it cooks in 20 minutes. You can also find precooked farro that takes only 10 minutes to cook. **SERVES 4**

## DAIRY-FREE

## VEGAN

½ teaspoon salt, plus  
more for water

2 cups pearled farro

Finely grated zest of  
½ lemon

2 tablespoons fresh  
lemon juice

1 tablespoon  
balsamic vinegar

Freshly ground  
black pepper

¼ cup extra-virgin  
olive oil

1 cup shredded carrots

1 small fennel bulb,  
cut into quarters  
and shaved

6 radishes, shaved

1 ounce baby spinach, cut  
into strips

1. In a large saucepan, bring salted water to a boil. Add the farro and boil for 20 minutes or until the farro is tender. Drain and rinse under running water to prevent overcooking. Cool for 10 minutes.
2. In a medium bowl, combine the lemon zest, lemon juice, vinegar, ½ teaspoon salt, and a pinch of pepper. Whisk well and gradually add the oil.
3. In a salad bowl, combine the farro, carrot, fennel, radish, and baby spinach. Toss to combine. Drizzle with the vinaigrette and toss to coat. Season with more salt, if needed.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Farro is an ancient whole grain, and possibly the oldest cultivated by humans. It's a convenient and wholesome alternative to rice or pasta. It has a lower caloric content compared to other cereals, and it is a great source of fiber, protein, and iron. It can be boiled like pasta, simmered like rice, or cooked in broth for soups.

**VARIATION TIP:** You can substitute rice or barley for farro, adjusting cooking time.









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# 4

## RISOTTO AND POLENTA

**R**isotto is a traditional Italian primo piatto, especially popular in Northern Italy. It's as versatile and elegant as a nice plate of pasta.

The first secret to an exquisite risotto is the rice you use in the recipe. My two main choices are Arborio or Carnaroli, short-grained and medium-grained rices, respectively, with high starch content, which absorbs more liquid for a creamier result. Secondly, you need to cook the rice while adding the liquid of choice (hot broth or water) gradually while stirring consistently. The rice absorbs it and turns into a velvety and mouthwatering dish. Lastly, you need to *mantecare* the risotto. It's such an important step that Italians even have a word for it. It means letting the risotto rest in the covered pan after cooking it *al dente*, with a little butter and Parmesan cheese (when called for in the recipe). This will add a note of creaminess to the risotto.

Polenta is another staple of Northern Italian cuisine, particularly of Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Polenta is boiled cornmeal made with coarsely ground yellow or white corn. It can be eaten right after boiling, when it's still deliciously creamy, or it can be left to cool down, then sliced and grilled. Either way, it makes for a wonderful and hearty dish.

# Risotto alla Milanese

## Risotto with Saffron

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **25** minutes

Here is how to make a basic creamy risotto. It takes a bit of stirring but you won't be disappointed. You can substitute extra-virgin olive oil for 2 tablespoons of butter at the beginning of the recipe to sauté the onions. You can also swap the broth with water, chicken, or vegetable bouillon.

**SERVES 4**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**  
**VEGETARIAN**

4 tablespoons

butter, divided

1 medium onion, chopped

Salt

1½ cups Arborio or  
Carnaroli rice

½ cup white wine

½ teaspoon

saffron threads

4 cups vegetable  
broth, warm

½ cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese

- 1.** In a large saucepan, melt 2 tablespoons of the butter over medium heat. Add the onion with a pinch of salt and sauté until translucent, about 3 minutes.
- 2.** Add the rice to the saucepan and stir constantly for 2 minutes.
- 3.** Add the white wine and saffron and let simmer for 2 more minutes until the wine evaporates almost completely.
- 4.** Add the warm broth 1 cup at a time, stirring constantly so that the rice doesn't stick to the bottom. Make sure each cup of broth is mostly absorbed before adding the next cup.
- 5.** Simmer over medium-low heat for 15 more minutes or until the rice is tender but still firm. At this point the broth should be completely absorbed. Salt to taste.



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- 6.** Remove the pan from the heat, add the remaining 2 tablespoons butter and the Parmesan cheese, and stir to combine. Cover the pan and let the risotto mantecare (rest) for 2 minutes before serving. Sprinkle with more Parmesan cheese, if you like.

**VARIATION TIP:** You can add a variety of ingredients to this basic risotto. The rule of thumb is to cook the vegetables first, and then follow this recipe adding the rice to the same pan with the vegetables, making sure all the ingredients will be ready at the same time.

**COOKING TIP:** Just like pasta, risotto should be cooked al dente, which means it should be slightly firm to the bite, not soft all the way through.

# Risotto with Porcini Mushrooms

PREP TIME: 5 minutes | INACTIVE TIME: 15 minutes | COOK TIME: 25 minutes

This is one of my favorite risotto recipes. Fresh porcini mushrooms are not as common in the United States as they are in Italy, so I use dried porcini mushrooms, which are perfect for this recipe. **SERVES 4**

**GLUTEN-FREE**  
**VEGETARIAN**

1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms, chopped  
4 tablespoons butter, divided  
2 garlic cloves, crushed or minced  
1½ cups Arborio or Carnaroli rice  
½ cup dry white wine  
3 cups hot broth, chicken or vegetable  
½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

1. Soak the dried mushrooms in 1 cup warm water for 15 minutes or longer. Drain well and reserve the water.
2. In a large saucepan, melt 2 tablespoons of the butter over medium heat. Add the garlic, mushrooms, and rice. Sauté for a couple of minutes while stirring constantly.
3. Add the white wine and simmer for 4 more minutes until it evaporates almost completely.
4. Add the mushroom water to the pan, being careful not to add the grit that has settled at the bottom. Once absorbed, start adding the broth ½ cup at a time, stirring often so that the rice doesn't stick to the bottom. Make sure the broth is mostly absorbed before adding the next ½ cup.
5. Simmer for 15 more minutes, or until the rice is al dente. The broth should all be absorbed. Add more if necessary and salt to taste.
6. Turn off the heat, add the remaining 2 tablespoons of the butter, Parmesan cheese, and parsley and mix. Cover with a lid and let the risotto sit for 2 minutes before serving. Sprinkle with more Parmesan cheese, if you like.

# Risotto with Radicchio and Sausage

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **25** minutes

Radicchio and sausage make a great combination of flavors (they're also great as a pasta sauce!). This recipe is traditionally made in Treviso using *radicchio tardivo di Treviso*, a local variety of radicchio with long and thin leaves. The varieties more commonly found in the United States are the round Chioggia and the long and wide Treviso. Both are great for this recipe. **SERVES 4**

## GLUTEN-FREE

12 ounces radicchio  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
½ onion, finely chopped  
2 Italian sausage links  
(8 ounces), removed  
from their casings  
1½ cup Arborio or  
Carnaroli rice  
½ cup white wine  
Salt  
¼ cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese  
2 tablespoons butter

1. Clean the radicchio by removing the outer leaves, if necessary. Cut out the core and discard. Peel off the leaves and cut into ½-inch-thick slices.
2. In a large saucepan, bring 5 cups water to a boil over high heat.
3. In a separate large saucepan, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion and sausage. Stir frequently while breaking up the sausage with a wooden spoon into smaller pieces. Cook for 5 minutes or until the onions are wilted and the sausage is browned.
4. Add the rice to the pan and cook for 2 minutes, stirring continuously.
5. Add the wine and simmer for 4 minutes or until the wine has mostly evaporated.
6. Add the shredded radicchio and mix until the radicchio wilts.
7. Add 1 cup water and salt to taste. Simmer and add more water when needed, ½ cup at a time. Stir often to make sure the rice doesn't stick to the bottom.
8. Simmer the rice for 15 more minutes, until al dente. Salt to taste if needed.
9. Turn off the heat, then add the Parmesan cheese and the butter. Mix quickly and serve.

# Risotto allo Scoglio

## Seafood Risotto

PREP TIME: **15** minutes | COOK TIME: **30** minutes

There are several names for this dish: risotto *ai frutti di mare* (seafood), *allo scoglio* (“at the rock,” meaning with crustaceans), or *alla pescatora* (fisherman-style). No matter what you call it, this seafood risotto is a must-try. My choices of seafood for this recipe are crustaceans and mollusks. Mussels, clams, shrimp, sea scallops, and calamari make this risotto flavorful and give it a deep-sea aroma. It’s best to see what fresh seafood is available at the fish market that day. And remember: Seafood is added to the risotto at the end or it will be overcooked and chewy. **SERVES 4 TO 6**

### GLUTEN-FREE

1 pound fresh seafood  
(raw shrimp, calamari,  
and/or sea scallops)  
3 tablespoons extra-virgin  
olive oil, divided  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
or minced  
1 tablespoon  
tomato paste  
½ cup white wine, divided  
½ pound fresh  
manila clams  
½ pound fresh mussels  
1 peperoncino (hot pepper)  
½ onion, diced  
1½ cups Arborio or  
Carnaroli rice  
Salt  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
2 tablespoons chopped  
fresh parsley  
2 tablespoons butter

1. Clean the seafood: Peel and devein the shrimp, scrub and rinse the clams and mussels, remove the beard from the mussels, and rinse and cut the calamari into rings.
2. Place the clams and mussels in a saucepan, cover with a lid, and cook until they open up, 4 to 5 minutes.
3. Remove most of the mussels and clams from the shell, and leave just a few inside to decorate the risotto at the end. Reserve the juice, sifting it through a fine-mesh strainer, discarding any sand deposit.
4. In a large sauté pan or skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil over medium-high heat and add the garlic and calamari. Cook for 4 minutes and add the shrimp (whole or cut in pieces). Mix and cook for a couple of minutes. Drizzle with the tomato paste and ¼ cup of the white wine. Simmer for a few minutes. Add the shelled clams and mussels. Toss and turn off the heat. Set aside and keep warm.



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5. In a separate large skillet, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium heat. Add the pepperoncino and onion and sauté for 2 minutes.
  6. Add the rice and cook for 1 more minute, stirring continuously. Add the remaining  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup white wine and simmer for 2 more minutes.
  7. Add the shellfish juice. Salt to taste. Stirring often, simmer the risotto for 10 minutes on medium-low heat, adding more water when it's absorbed.
  8. Transfer the seafood to the pan of rice and mix. Cook for another 5 minutes or until the rice is cooked al dente. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle with parsley and add the butter. Mix and serve, garnished with the reserved clams and mussels in the shell.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** If you don't use clams or mussels, substitute fish stock for the shellfish juice.

# Risotto al Salto

## Crispy Rice Cake

**PREP TIME:** 15 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 15 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 35 minutes

Here is a crispy, golden, buttery, and cheesy way to use leftover risotto, just the way Milanese do. For this recipe you need some cold Risotto alla Milanese, or a simple risotto (like cheese or peas). You can serve *risotto al salto* as a primo piatto or an appetizer. Once you try it, you will be making extra risotto all the time so that you can make this again. **MAKES 2 CAKES**

**= SERVES 4 AS AN ANTIPASTO OR 2 AS A PRIMO PIATTO**

### GLUTEN-FREE

### VEGETARIAN

2 tablespoons

butter, divided

4 cups cold Risotto

alla Milanese

(page 40), divided

2 tablespoons freshly

grated Parmesan

cheese, divided

1. In a 9- or 10-inch nonstick pan, melt 1 tablespoon of the butter over medium-high heat. When foaming, add 2 cups of the risotto and pack it down using a wooden spoon or spatula to make a thick, round pancake.
2. Cook on medium-high heat for 4 to 5 minutes until well browned on the bottom. Make sure to gently rotate and move the cake around while cooking so that it doesn't stick. Sprinkle the top with 1 tablespoon of the Parmesan cheese.
3. Loosen the edges of the cake with a spatula and gently slide the rice cake onto a large flat plate. Place the pan upside-down on top of the cake and invert the rice cake back into the pan. Cook the other side on medium-high for 4 to 5 more minutes until golden. Slide onto a plate. Cut into wedges and serve hot. Repeat the steps for the second rice cake or cook at the same time using two pans.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Use 1½ cups uncooked rice to yield 4 cups cooked risotto.

**TROUBLESHOOTING TIP:** If the cake breaks while flipping, do not worry. Press it down to the pan again with the wooden spoon. Flip once more, if needed.

# Risotto with Shrimp and Asparagus

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **25** minutes

A one-pan, one-dish dinner perfect for a fancy get-together or a week-night family dinner. It's that good and that easy. **SERVES 4**

## GLUTEN-FREE

12 ounces asparagus  
2 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive oil  
½ onion, finely chopped  
1 garlic clove, minced  
12 ounces shrimp, peeled  
and deveined  
Salt  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
1½ cups Arborio or  
Carnaroli rice  
6 cups hot water or warm  
vegetable broth  
2 tablespoons butter  
2 tablespoons chopped  
fresh parsley

1. Wash and snap off the bottom part of the asparagus with your hands, as close to the bottom as you can. Cut off the tips, and diagonally slice the rest in ½-inch pieces.
2. In a large saucepan or skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat and sauté the onion for 2 minutes. Add the garlic, asparagus, and shrimp. Sear over medium-high heat for 3 minutes, or until the shrimp change color. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
3. Remove the shrimp from the pan and set aside. Add the rice and cook over medium heat for 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
4. Add one cup of water or broth, and cook the risotto for 15 minutes, stirring often, and adding more hot water or broth when absorbed, 1 cup at a time.
5. Return the shrimp to the pan. Finish cooking until the rice is al dente. Remove from the heat, then add the butter and parsley. Mix and let the risotto sit covered in the pan for 2 minutes before serving.

# Risi e Bisi

## Veneto-Style Rice and Peas

PREP TIME: 10 minutes | COOK TIME: 30 minutes

*Risi e bisi* is a typical recipe from Veneto, great for springtime, when you can find fresh *bisi* (Venetian dialect for “peas”). This is not quite a risotto, and not really a soup, but something in between. In Italian we would say it’s a risotto *all’onda* (“flowing in waves,” meaning just that: fairly fluid that will spread out on the plate when served). **SERVES 4**

### GLUTEN-FREE

2 tablespoons olive oil  
½ medium onion,  
finely chopped  
2 ounces pancetta (or  
bacon), finely diced  
2 tablespoons chopped  
fresh parsley, plus more  
for serving  
1¼ cups peas, fresh  
or frozen  
5 cups hot vegetable  
broth, divided  
1½ cups Vialone Nano or  
Arborio rice  
Salt  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
2 tablespoons butter  
½ cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese, plus  
more for serving

1. In a large saucepan, heat the oil for 1 minute over medium heat, and add the onion, pancetta, and parsley. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Add the peas (if fresh) and cook for another 5 minutes.
2. Add 4 cups of the hot broth and bring to a boil.
3. Add the rice, peas (if frozen), and salt and pepper to taste, and cook until al dente, about 15 minutes, adding more broth if necessary. Remember, this risotto needs to be very runny.
4. Turn off the heat, and add the butter and Parmesan cheese. Mix well until the butter is fully melted. Season with salt, if needed.
5. Serve with more fresh parsley and/or Parmesan cheese, if desired.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** If using fresh peas, you need 2 pounds peas in their pods for this recipe. Save the pods, wash them, add to the broth, and let it simmer for 5 minutes for extra flavor.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Vialone Nano is the best rice for this recipe. It’s a *semifino*, medium-grain rice originally from Verona. It absorbs a lot of water while keeping its shape.



# Basic Polenta

PREP TIME: 5 minutes | COOK TIME: 45 minutes

Soft polenta can be served with barbecue or stews, meat or fish. Even though traditional polenta is served plain, you can add grated Parmesan cheese or other shredded cheese or herbs for extra flavor. I like to use a heavy-bottomed saucepan (or use a Dutch oven if you have one) when making polenta. Make sure to leave the polenta in the pot until ready to serve. Once you pour it out on a serving plate, it will cool down and harden. **SERVES 6**

**DAIRY-FREE**

**VEGAN**

4 cups water

1 teaspoon salt, plus  
more if needed

1 tablespoon extra-virgin  
olive oil

1 cup polenta flour  
(yellow cornmeal)

1. In a large pan, bring the water to a boil. Add the salt and oil, and gradually pour in the flour while mixing vigorously with a wooden spoon, making sure there are no clumps.
2. Lower the heat and let the polenta simmer, stirring often so that it won't stick to the bottom. Cook for 40 minutes or until it pulls away from the sides of the pan when mixing. If for any reason the polenta becomes too thick, thin it by adding 2 or 3 tablespoons water. Cook longer for a denser polenta. Taste and season with salt.
3. Transfer to a large serving plate or round wooden board as per tradition. Serve when still soft and hot.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** You can easily find instant polenta flour. The steps to make it are the same, but it cooks in only a few minutes, which makes it the best choice when time is an issue.

**TROUBLESHOOTING TIP:** If you are not able to break down all the clumps of polenta flour when mixing, remove the pan from the stove and use an immersion blender to make it smooth. Return to the stove and continue cooking.

# Grilled Polenta

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 1½ hours | **COOK TIME:** 20 minutes

If you have leftover polenta, this is what you want to do with it: slice and grill. And once you taste how good grilled polenta is, you will want to make extras every time! Or, as I normally do, make some instant polenta ahead of time, and let it cool down completely before grilling. **SERVES 4 TO 6**

## **DAIRY-FREE**

## **VEGAN**

6 cups water

1 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 (13-ounce) package  
instant polenta

- 1.** Bring the water to a boil in a large pan. Add the salt and oil, and gradually pour in the polenta while mixing vigorously with a wooden spoon, making sure there are no clumps.
- 2.** Lower the heat and let the polenta simmer, stirring continuously for 3 to 4 minutes until it thickens.
- 3.** Wet a 9-inch square or round pan with water. Pour in the hot polenta and cool at room temperature. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour or longer.
- 4.** Preheat a grill or grill pan on medium-high heat. Cut the polenta into ½-inch slices. Lightly oil the grill or pan and grill the slices of polenta until golden and clearly marked, 7 to 8 minutes, depending on your grill or pan. Don't move or try to flip if it's too early, or the polenta might break. Flip the polenta slices and grill the other side. Serve hot.

**VARIATION TIP:** You can use grilled polenta in place of bread for your favorite crostini, topped with Bolognese sauce or cheese and salami.

# Baked Polenta with Cheese, Mushrooms, and Sausage

PREP TIME: 20 minutes | COOK TIME: 60 minutes

This dish combines polenta, melted cheese, sautéed mushrooms, and sausages in the same oven-safe (terra-cotta if you have it) bowls, for an unforgettable, simple, and hearty meal. This is the type of dish you'd find in a *baita*, a rustic lodge up in the Alps. You can substitute the sausage with a slice or two of sopressata, if you prefer. Or skip it and enjoy an amazing vegetarian dish. **SERVES 4**

4 cups Basic Polenta  
(page 49)

1 tablespoon butter

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 garlic clove, crushed

8 ounces country-style  
sausage (or two links),  
casings removed

8 ounces fresh  
mushrooms, sliced

2 tablespoons chopped  
fresh parsley, divided

Salt

Freshly ground  
black pepper

4 ounces Fontina cheese  
(or Taleggio or Asiago,  
not aged), diced

2 tablespoons  
freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese

1. Make the Basic Polenta, adding 1 tablespoon butter at the end.
2. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 400°F. In a large sauté pan or skillet, heat the oil with the garlic over medium-high heat. Add the sausage and brown, breaking it up with a wooden spoon into small pieces. Cook for 6 minutes, stirring occasionally, until browned on all sides.
3. Add the mushrooms and 1 tablespoon of the parsley. Season lightly with salt and pepper, and cook for 5 minutes.
4. When the polenta is ready, add a layer of soft polenta to the bottom of 4 oven-safe bowls.
5. Divide the mushrooms and sausage mixture among the bowls, and top with half of the Fontina cheese. Cover with the remaining polenta and Fontina cheese, and sprinkle the Parmesan over the top.
6. Bake in the upper part of the oven for 10 minutes or until the cheese on top is melted and lightly golden. Serve immediately, sprinkled with the remaining parsley.

**COOKING TIP:** Place the bowls on a baking sheet before baking, just in case the polenta or cheese spill over. Your oven will stay clean and spill-free.







# 5

## SAUCES AND PASTA

**"B**UTTO LA PASTA!" That's what my mom would say, calling out from the kitchen at lunchtime when I was growing up. Literally, it translates to "I'm throwing the pasta." Technically, it meant the water was boiling and she was ready to dunk the pasta in to cook. Practically, it meant I had to hurry up, wash my hands, and find my seat at the table.

How much time did I have? Well, that all depended on what was for lunch. It took a keen sense of smell and a stolen peek over my mom's shoulder to see what sauce was simmering on the stove. I had a couple of minutes for fresh pasta and gnocchi, to around 4 minutes for thin spaghetti (my mom's favorite), to 9 or 10 minutes for short pasta. I could tell pasta time even before I could read a watch.

Here are some things to always keep in mind when cooking your pasta: Use a large enough pot to allow the pasta to boil well. Stir as soon as you drop it in the boiling water and until the water starts boiling again so that the pasta will not stick together. Always cook pasta al dente, especially if you end up tossing it in the pan with the sauce. Remember to save some of the starchy pasta water before draining to add to the sauce. And don't rinse the pasta after draining, or the sauce will not stick to the pasta as well. Are you ready to throw the pasta, too?!

# Basic Tomato Sauce

PREP TIME: **3** minutes | COOK TIME: **20** minutes

This simple red sauce can be added to any pasta shape for a yummy and easy dinner. Even though fresh tomatoes are the best, it's not always easy to find flavorful ones. Therefore, I generally use canned tomatoes, like high-quality San Marzano. You can buy them crushed, whole, or diced, as long as there are no added ingredients like basil leaves, which change and overpower the flavor of the tomatoes. **SERVES 6**

## **30 MINUTES OR LESS**

**DAIRY-FREE**

**GLUTEN-FREE**

**VEGAN**

**3 tablespoons**

extra-virgin olive oil

**3 garlic cloves, crushed**

or minced

**1 (28-ounce) can crushed**

or diced San Marzano  
tomatoes

**1 teaspoon salt, plus**

more if needed

**½ teaspoon dried**

oregano (optional)

**6 fresh basil leaves, torn**

- 1.** In a large sauté pan or skillet, heat the oil and garlic over medium heat for 1 minute.
- 2.** Add the tomatoes, salt, and the oregano, if using.
- 3.** Lower the heat and simmer for about 15 minutes. When ready, add the basil and season with salt, if needed. Discard the garlic, if crushed.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Crush the garlic by pressing down on each clove with the flat of a large knife blade. I like to crush the garlic rather than mince it so that it infuses its flavor but can be removed at the end to prevent overpowering the taste of the sauce.

# Ragù alla Bolognese

## Meat Sauce

**PREP TIME:** 15 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 90 minutes

This meat sauce, originally from Bologna, is very versatile: used in lasagna, or over gnocchi or any shape of pasta—pappardelle, *linguine*, spaghetti, or your favorite pasta. This sauce freezes really well, so I always make a large pot by doubling the recipe. **SERVES 6**

**DAIRY-FREE**  
**GLUTEN-FREE**

¼ cup extra-virgin  
olive oil  
1 carrot, minced  
1 small onion, minced  
1 celery stalk, minced  
Salt  
⅔ pound ground beef  
½ pound ground pork  
1 (28-ounce) can crushed  
tomatoes  
½ cup white wine  
1 rosemary sprig  
2 whole cloves (optional)  
Freshly ground  
black pepper

1. In a large saucepan, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the carrot, onion, celery, and a pinch of salt. Sauté for 5 minutes, stirring often.
2. Add the ground beef and pork. Increase the heat to high and stir continuously with a wooden spoon, breaking up the meat into smaller pieces. Cook for 15 to 20 minutes or until all the meat is browned.
3. Add the tomatoes, white wine, rosemary, and whole cloves, if using. Add salt and pepper to taste, cover the pan, and simmer over medium-low heat for at least 1 hour, stirring occasionally.
4. If the sauce is too watery, cook uncovered for 10 more minutes. Taste and season with salt, if necessary.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** You can use all ground beef if you prefer, but I feel that the mix of beef and pork yields a tastier sauce.

# Pesto alla Genovese

## Pesto Sauce

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes

It's called pesto, derivative of the Italian *pestare*, meaning "to pound," because the traditional Italian recipe asks for the use of a mortar and pestle to crush the ingredients. If mortar and pestle are not readily available, you can use a blender or a food processor. The result is just as good and it takes only a few minutes to whip up. Pesto sauce is perfect for pasta, but it can also be spread on bread as an appetizer or used as a condiment for other recipes. **SERVES 4**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**  
**VEGETARIAN**

1 garlic clove

1 tablespoon pine nuts

6 tablespoons

extra-virgin olive oil,  
plus more if needed

Leaves from 1 large  
bunch fresh basil  
(about 1 ounce)

Salt

¼ cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese

1. Slice the garlic clove lengthwise and remove the sprout (the greenish central part) so that the garlic is easier to digest.
2. In a blender, combine garlic, pine nuts, and oil, then pulse.
3. Add the basil and a pinch of salt, and blend until smooth and thick.
4. Transfer to a bowl and stir in the grated Parmesan cheese. Season with salt and more oil, if necessary.

**COOKING TIP:** When making pasta, remember to reserve some of the cooking water. It's perfect to add to the pesto sauce if it comes out too thick.

**STORAGE TIP:** You can store pesto sauce in a jar in the refrigerator, adding a drizzle of olive oil on top. It will stay fresh for a couple of days.

**VARIATION TIP:** To change things up, or if you don't have enough fresh basil, you can always replace some, or all, of the basil with other greens, like baby spinach or arugula.



# Besciamella Sauce

## White Sauce

**PREP TIME:** 5 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 15 minutes

This is a delicate and versatile sauce, simply made with milk, butter, and flour. It's used to make the creamiest lasagna and *pasta al forno* (oven-baked pasta). It can be used on pasta or crepes, just as is or with the addition of other ingredients like tasty cheese, peas, and ham, or sautéed mushrooms. **SERVES 4 TO 6**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**  
**VEGETARIAN**

4 tablespoons  
unsalted butter  
2½ cups milk, divided  
½ cup all-purpose flour  
½ teaspoon salt  
¼ teaspoon grated  
nutmeg (optional)

1. In a large saucepan, melt the butter with ½ cup of the milk over medium heat. In a separate pan, warm up the remaining 2 cups milk.
2. Add the flour to the melted butter and milk, and whisk well. Cook for 2 minutes at medium-low heat while mixing.
3. Add the remaining milk, a little at a time while whisking more energetically, until smooth.
4. Season with the salt and nutmeg, if using. When it starts to boil, reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes, whisking often.

**TROUBLESHOOTING TIP:** If after whisking for several minutes you still have some lumps in the sauce, do not despair. Simply remove the pan from the heat, use an immersion blender, and watch the sauce turn into a creamy and perfectly smooth mixture.

# Homemade Egg Tagliatelle Pasta

PREP TIME: **30** minutes | INACTIVE TIME: **1** hour

Here are all the steps and secrets to make the perfect handmade egg pasta. All you need are two ingredients (flour and eggs) and a rolling pin. I like to cut the pasta by hand for a rustic and homemade look. With this recipe you can make *tagliatelle* (¼ inch wide), *pappardelle* (½ inch wide), lasagna sheets, or stuffed pasta, like tortellini or ravioli. **SERVES 4**

**DAIRY-FREE**  
**VEGETARIAN**

4 large eggs  
3 cups all-purpose flour

- 1.** In a small bowl, beat the eggs with a fork. Working on a clean counter, mound the flour on the counter and make a well in the middle. Pour the beaten eggs into the well and with a fork mix the eggs, incorporating some of the flour from the sides, making sure the eggs don't run outside the mound and all over the counter.
- 2.** Once the dough starts to come together, continue mixing with your fingers to incorporate more flour. Use just enough flour so that the dough is not sticky but is also not too hard. There might be some leftover flour on the counter, depending on the size of your eggs. Work and knead the dough for at least 5 to 10 minutes, until moist, smooth, and elastic.
- 3.** Mold the dough into a disc, wrap it in plastic wrap, and let rest for 30 minutes. Unwrap and knead for a few minutes. Wrap it again and let rest for another 30 minutes.
- 4.** Working with ½ or ⅓ of the dough at a time, roll with a rolling pin or pasta maker if you have it. Keep what you are not using wrapped. Turn and move the dough often while rolling, and sprinkle lightly with flour if needed so that it doesn't stick to the counter. Roll it out as thin as you can, possibly 1 millimeter in thickness.

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5. Cut the dough in half. Place the two halves on top of each other and fold or roll on itself one time. Using a sharp knife cut the tagliatelle, about ¼-inch wide. Unfold the cut pasta, opening them into long ribbons. Gather the ribbons into loose nests, and set on a lightly floured baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Repeat with the remaining dough.
  6. You can cook the pasta right away, dropping it in a pot of salted boiling water. It takes only a couple of minutes to cook. The cooking time depends on how thick you made the pasta. Serve with your favorite sauce.

**STORAGE TIP:** Fresh pasta can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 days, or in the freezer for a couple of months. Before you can refrigerate or freeze the pasta, you need to let it air-dry, uncovered, for 30 to 60 minutes, so it will not stick together. Once dry, store in a freezer bag or other container in the refrigerator or freezer.

# Homemade Spinach Ricotta Ravioli

PREP TIME: 1 hour | INACTIVE TIME: 1 hour | COOK TIME: 5 minutes

With this recipe you can make around 45 ravioli, 2½ inches in diameter, to serve at least 4 people. For the sauce, I suggest drizzling the ravioli with sage-infused melted butter and sprinkling with lots of freshly grated Parmesan cheese. **SERVES 4**

## VEGETARIAN

### Homemade Egg

Tagliatelle Pasta

(page 58)

10 ounces fresh

baby spinach

8 ounces whole-milk

ricotta cheese

1 egg

½ cup freshly grated

Parmesan cheese

¼ teaspoon

grated nutmeg

Salt

1. Make the fresh pasta dough using the Homemade Egg Tagliatelle Pasta recipe, and let the dough rest, wrapped in plastic.
2. In a large saucepan over high heat, cook the spinach in boiling water for 3 minutes or until tender. Drain and squeeze out as much water as you can. Chop the spinach.
3. In a large bowl, combine the chopped spinach with the ricotta cheese, egg, Parmesan cheese, nutmeg, and a pinch of salt. Mix all the ingredients together.
4. Divide the pasta dough into two parts. Keep the half that you are not using in the plastic wrap. On a lightly floured counter, roll the dough out in a thin layer, about ⅛ inch, or as thin as you can make it. When you roll, always make sure the pasta doesn't stick to the counter. Move and rotate the dough as necessary.
5. Cut the rolled dough in half. Using your ravioli stamp, mark (do not cut) half of the dough with circles as close to each other as possible. Add about 1 teaspoon of filling in the middle of each circle. Use half of the ricotta and spinach filling.



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- 6.** Place the other half of rolled pasta on top, and press down around the filling with your fingers, to get most of the air out so that your ravioli will seal nicely. Cut the ravioli using your cutter. Set them side-by-side on lightly floured parchment paper. Make sure the ravioli do not touch each other. Repeat steps 5 and 6 with the remaining dough.
  - 7.** In a large pot over high heat, bring salted water to a boil. Cook the ravioli for 1 to 2 minutes after they start to float. Taste one ravioli for doneness before removing them from the water. Serve immediately with your favorite sauce.

# Spaghetti alla Carbonara

PREP TIME: 5 minutes | COOK TIME: 20 minutes

A staple of Roman cuisine, *pasta alla carbonara* is one of the most delectable, yet controversial Italian recipes out there. The original recipe calls for *guanciale* (cured pork cheek), but because it is hard to find I generally substitute pancetta or salt-cured pork. Bacon would also be a great easy-to-find alternative (just do not serve it to an Italian under any circumstances). For the cheese you can use Pecorino Romano, Parmesan, or a mix of the two. Some make this pasta with just the egg yolks, but I like to use the whole egg. And some nontraditional recipes add heavy cream to the eggs for a softer result. **SERVES 4**

## 30 MINUTES OR LESS

½ teaspoon salt, plus  
more for water

12 ounces thick spaghetti

2 tablespoons olive oil

4 ounces guanciale (or  
pancetta), cut into  
¼-inch cubes

4 eggs

1 cup freshly  
grated Pecorino  
Romano cheese

Freshly ground  
black pepper

1. In a large pot over high heat, bring salted water to a boil. Add the spaghetti and cook over medium-high heat, mixing occasionally until al dente, about 1 minute less than you would normally do.
2. Meanwhile, in a sauté pan or skillet large enough to hold the spaghetti, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the guanciale and sauté, mixing often for five minutes or until crispy. Turn off the heat if ready before the spaghetti.
3. In a bowl, combine the eggs, cheese, salt, and pepper to taste and beat well.
4. Drain the pasta, reserving two tablespoons of pasta water. Add the spaghetti to the skillet and toss with the guanciale. Turn off the flame and add the egg mixture and 1 (or 2 if needed) tablespoon of pasta water. Quickly mix the spaghetti with the sauce so that the eggs will cook with the heat of the pasta only, but will stay creamy and soft without curdling.
5. Sprinkle with more cheese or pepper to taste and serve.

# Pasta all'Amatriciana

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **20** minutes

Traditionally from the town of Amatrice, from which it gets its name, this most famous and exquisite pasta is a must-have the next time you find yourself in Rome. As with the Spaghetti alla Carbonara (page 62), there are a few variations of the recipe. Most agree that there should be guanciale, cured pork cheek, and not pancetta. Some have chopped onion and some don't. I say no garlic no matter what someone tells you. Most ask for Pecorino Romano cheese, but I think it's just as great if you substitute Parmesan cheese. But don't tell any Romans I said that. It's our secret! **SERVES 4**

## **30 MINUTES OR LESS**

**2 tablespoons**  
extra-virgin olive oil  
**½ medium onion,**  
finely chopped  
**2 ounces guanciale (or**  
pancetta), cubed  
**2 peperoncini,**  
broken in half  
**1 (14.5-ounce) can**  
crushed San Marzano  
tomatoes  
**½ cup dry white wine**  
Salt  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
**12 ounces thick spaghetti**  
or bucatini pasta  
**6 fresh basil leaves**  
**¼ cup grated**  
Pecorino Romano

- 1.** In a large sauté pan or skillet, sauté the oil, onion, guanciale, and peperoncini over medium-high heat for 5 minutes, until the onion is tender.
- 2.** Add tomatoes, wine, and a pinch of salt.
- 3.** As soon as the sauce boils, reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for 15 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste, if necessary.
- 4.** Meanwhile, in a large pot over high heat, bring salted water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook over medium-high heat stirring occasionally, until al dente.
- 5.** Drain the pasta, and toss in the skillet with the sauce, basil, and cheese.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** If you can't find guanciale or pancetta, I think the next best alternative is salt-cured pork, which I can easily find at any grocery store. I find it more suitable than slab bacon for this recipe. Please make sure to not add too much salt in the sauce, because this pork is plenty salty.

# Cacio e Pepe

## Cheese and Pepper Pasta

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **10** minutes

Making *cacio e pepe* is a technique that needs to be mastered. Even if there are only 4 ingredients in this recipe, it's not as basic as it sounds, so be sure not to skip any of the steps below. In 20 minutes of your time, you'll end up with the most creamy and luscious, smooth and gooey pasta. **SERVES 4**

### 30 MINUTES OR LESS VEGETARIAN

#### Salt

12 ounces thick spaghetti

1 tablespoon butter

1 tablespoon freshly

crushed black pepper

6 ounces freshly grated

Pecorino Romano

cheese (or half Pecorino

Romano and half

Parmesan)

1. In a large pot over high heat, bring salted water to a boil, using half the salt you would normally use. Add the pasta and reduce to medium-high heat until al dente.
2. Meanwhile, in a sauté pan or skillet big enough to hold the pasta, melt the butter and crushed pepper over medium heat.
3. Five minutes before the pasta is ready, take 1 cup of cooking water and add it to the skillet. It will quickly boil.
4. In a medium bowl, combine the cheese and ½ cup of cooking water. Mix until you get a soft paste-like consistency. Add more cooking water, if needed.
5. When cooked al dente, remove the pasta with a spaghetti claw, saving the water. Add to the skillet and toss.
6. Remove the skillet from the heat, let it cool for 1 minute, and add the cheese paste. Toss quickly, until the pasta is nicely coated and creamy. Add more of the cooking water, if needed. Serve immediately, topped with more pepper to taste.

**COOKING TIP:** Use less water to cook the pasta than you normally would. It makes for more starchy water and a creamier sauce.



# *Penne alla Vodka*

## **Penne Pasta with Vodka Sauce**

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 20 minutes

Creamy, rich, and spicy, you can add as little or as much peperoncino as you like to this sauce. I've seen this recipe done with pancetta, but I personally prefer it without. It makes a great vegetarian recipe. You can also use rigatoni in place of the *penne*, if you like. **SERVES 4**

### **30 MINUTES OR LESS VEGETARIAN**

3 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive oil  
½ medium onion,  
finely chopped  
2 peperoncini, or more if  
you like a spicier sauce  
1 (14.5-ounce) can  
crushed tomatoes  
Salt  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
½ cup vodka  
12 ounces penne pasta  
½ cup heavy cream  
¼ cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese

- 1.** In a large saucepan heat the oil, and sauté the onion and crushed peperoncini over medium-low heat for 5 minutes or until translucent.
- 2.** Add the crushed tomatoes and season with salt and pepper. Simmer the sauce for 10 to 15 minutes.
- 3.** Add the vodka, then stir and cover the saucepan. Simmer over low heat for 5 more minutes.
- 4.** Meanwhile, in a large pot over high heat, bring salted water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook over medium-high heat until al dente, stirring occasionally.
- 5.** Uncover the saucepan and add the heavy cream to the sauce. Simmer over medium heat for a few more minutes. Taste and season with more salt if necessary.
- 6.** Drain the pasta and add it to the saucepan. Toss with the Parmesan cheese and serve.

# Spaghetti alle Vongole

## Spaghetti with Clam Sauce

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **20** minutes

This is a traditionally Neapolitan dish that is very popular in Italy and in Italian restaurants everywhere, and it's my absolute favorite seafood pasta. This pasta takes less than 30 minutes to prepare. All you need is to run to the fish market for fresh clams, and I'm pretty sure everything else is already in your pantry. Some recipes ask for tomato sauce, but this "white" recipe is by far my favorite. You can add some freshly grated lemon zest when serving, for extra flavor. And I beg you, no cream or cheese on this pasta! **SERVES 4**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**  
**DAIRY-FREE**

**2½ pounds fresh manila clams, cleaned**  
**4 garlic cloves, divided**  
**12 ounces thick spaghetti**  
**3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**  
**3 peperoncini**  
**1 cup dry white wine**  
**2 tablespoons plain bread crumbs (optional)**  
**2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley**  
**Salt**

- 1.** Place the clams in a large saucepan with 2 garlic cloves, crushed. Cover the pot and heat over medium-high for 5 minutes.
- 2.** In a large pot, bring salted water to a boil over high heat. Reduce to medium-high to cook the spaghetti as directed on the box.
- 3.** In a sauté pan or skillet large enough to hold the spaghetti, sauté over medium heat the remaining 2 garlic cloves minced with the oil and peperoncini.
- 4.** Take all the clams that opened from the pot and add them to the skillet, removing the shell from half of the clams. If you have clams that did not open, cook them covered for 1 extra minute. If open, add them to the skillet, or discard if still closed.
- 5.** Filter the water left by the clams with a fine mesh strainer and add the liquid to the skillet. Discard the sandy remains in the strainer.
- 6.** Add the white wine, bread crumbs (if using), and most of the parsley. Cook for 5 minutes. Season with salt, if necessary.

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7. When the spaghetti is al dente, drain, reserving some of the cooking water. Toss the pasta in the skillet with the clams for one minute, adding some cooking water to moisten. Sprinkle with the remaining parsley and serve immediately.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** If you buy the clams in the morning for dinnertime, as I generally do, don't leave them in the closed package or bag. They will die with no air. As soon as you get home, open the bag, place the clams in a large bowl, with ice if possible, and store in the refrigerator until you are ready to cook. To clean the clams, place them under running water, scrape the shells clean, and discard any broken ones.

# *Spaghetti Aglio Olio e Peperoncino*

## Spaghetti with Garlic, Oil, and Hot Peppers

**PREP TIME:** 4 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 15 minutes

This classic is the quickest and easiest pasta you can possibly prepare. It's one of my favorites, especially for all those occasions when time is of the essence: when the kids are starving and begging for food, or those times when the refrigerator is mostly empty and there is no time to run to the grocery store. This pasta takes no more than 15 minutes from start to finish. To make this recipe a success, you need a good quality, flavorful extra-virgin olive oil, fresh parsley—I like the flat Italian type, and hot peperoncini, those tiny, dry, and extremely spicy Italian red peppers. The fruity flavor of the olive oil is complemented by the spicy and nutty taste of the garlic and peperoncini. The chopped parsley added at the end and sprinkled on top balances all the flavors and adds freshness to this Italian pasta. So simple, yet so tasty. **SERVES 4**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**  
**DAIRY-FREE**  
**VEGAN**

Salt  
12 ounces  
spaghetti pasta  
6 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive oil  
3 garlic cloves, sliced  
3 peperoncini  
2 tablespoons chopped  
fresh parsley

1. In a large pot over high heat, bring salted water to a boil and reduce to medium-high to cook the spaghetti al dente, as directed on the box.
2. Meanwhile, in a small sauté pan or skillet, heat the oil over medium heat, and sauté the garlic with the peperoncini broken into pieces for 2 minutes. Turn off the heat once the garlic is slightly golden.
3. Drain the spaghetti and place it back in the pot. Drizzle with the oil and toss. You can remove the garlic and peperoncini if you prefer, or leave them for a bolder flavor. Sprinkle with the chopped parsley and serve.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** I'm a big fan of thick spaghetti, but for this recipe I love to use thin or angel hair spaghetti, which the oil coats better. And it makes the recipe even quicker!



# Trofie alla Genovese

## Pasta with Pesto, Green Beans, and Potatoes

PREP TIME: **15** minutes | COOK TIME: **15** minutes

This pasta from Genoa is a mouthwatering one-pot, one-dish dinner that's ready in about 20 minutes. It's a tasty pasta mingled with tender green beans and wholesome potatoes, coated in a creamy and aromatic pesto sauce. The traditional Ligurian recipe asks for trofie pasta, but many pasta shapes work with this sauce. **SERVES 4**

### **30 MINUTES OR LESS** **VEGETARIAN**

#### Salt

1 potato, peeled  
and diced

8 ounces green beans,  
cleaned and cut into  
1-inch pieces

12 ounces trofie pasta (or  
other short pasta)

½ cup Pesto alla  
Genovese (page 56)

2 teaspoons extra-virgin  
olive oil

¼ cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese

- 1.** In a large pot over high heat, bring salted water to a boil with the potato.
- 2.** Add the green beans and the pasta and cook over medium-high heat until al dente, about 9 minutes (make sure to follow the time on the package).
- 3.** Drain the pasta when ready, saving some of the cooking water. Toss with the pesto, oil, Parmesan cheese, and some of the pasta water, if necessary. Serve.

**COOKING TIP:** The pasta should be ready at the same time as the vegetables, but some trofie pasta needs 15 to 20 minutes to cook. If you use a pasta that takes less time, cook the green beans first for a few minutes.

# Traditional Lasagna

PREP TIME: **30** minutes | COOK TIME: **2** hours

This classic Italian lasagna is a combination of savory Bolognese and creamy *besciamella* sauce, in a layered pasta that is perfectly cheesy, meaty, and saucy. This is one of my favorite *primi piatti* to serve when I have guests. It can be made ahead of time, and reheated right before serving. It's a sure way to wow your guests. Don't get scared by the many steps and long list of ingredients. It's really not that hard once you break it down into three main parts: Bolognese sauce, which can be done the day before, the besciamella right before assembling, and assembling the ingredients together in a baking pan. Leftovers are always welcome! **SERVES 6 TO 8**

Ragù alla Bolognese  
(page 55)

Besciamella Sauce  
(page 57)

10 ounces oven-ready  
lasagna pasta

12 ounces fresh  
mozzarella  
cheese, diced

1 cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese

1 tablespoon butter

1. Prepare the Ragù alla Bolognese.
2. Fifteen minutes before the Bolognese sauce is ready, make the Besciamella Sauce.
3. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Assemble the lasagna: Spread 3 tablespoons of Bolognese sauce on the bottom of the baking dish. Add a layer of pasta without overlapping, breaking it roughly with your hands, if needed, to fit. Spread another thin layer of Bolognese sauce, a thin layer of besciamella sauce, and sprinkle some mozzarella on top.
4. Repeat the layers (pasta, Bolognese, besciamella, and mozzarella) three more times or until you run out of ingredients.
5. Sprinkle the top with Parmesan cheese and a few slivers of butter. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 25 minutes.

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6. Uncover, turn up the heat to 400°F, and bake in the upper part of the oven for 5 minutes or until the top is golden and bubbly. You could also broil for 1 minute but be careful not to burn the top.
  7. Let it cool for about 10 minutes before cutting and serving.

**COOKING TIP:** Unless you like a very soft and runny lasagna, I recommend letting the lasagna cool down for 10 minutes or longer before serving. You can always bake ahead of time and reheat before serving.

# Pasta alla Norma

## Sicilian Pasta with Eggplant Sauce

PREP TIME: **15** minutes | COOK TIME: **30** minutes

A classic Sicilian dish made with short pasta tossed in tomato sauce, fried eggplants, and *ricotta salata*. It's said that this pasta is called *alla Norma* after Nino Martoglio (1870-1921), a famous playwright from Catania who tried this pasta and said that it was a true "Norma," comparing the amazing dish to the homonymous masterpiece by Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835), which played at that time. **SERVES 4**

### VEGETARIAN

6 tablespoons olive

oil, divided

2 garlic cloves, crushed

1 (14.5-ounce) can

crushed San Marzano  
tomatoes

½ teaspoon dried

oregano (optional)

Salt

Pepper

1 large eggplant, cut into

⅓-inch cubes

12 ounces short pasta

(rigatoni or penne)

10 leaves fresh basil

½ cup grated

*ricotta salata*

1. In a medium saucepan heat 2 tablespoons of oil over medium heat. Reduce to medium-low and sauté the garlic cloves for 1 minute. Add the tomatoes, oregano, salt, and pepper to taste. Simmer for 20 minutes over medium-low heat. Remove the garlic at the end, if you'd like.
2. In a separate large skillet, heat 4 tablespoons of oil over medium-high heat. Cook the eggplant, while stirring, until golden on each side. Add more oil as needed. You might have to cook in batches to not overcrowd the pan.
3. In a large pot, bring salted water to a boil over high heat, reduce to medium-high and cook the pasta al dente, as directed on the box.
4. Drain the pasta well, toss the pasta with the sauce, eggplant, basil broken in pieces, and the grated *ricotta salata*. Toss and serve.

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**VARIATION TIP:** The eggplant can be deep-fried in slices and cubed. You can also make a lighter version by baking the eggplant: Place the slices in a single layer on a baking sheet. Drizzle with olive oil. Bake at 400°F for 30 minutes until golden and tender. Cut in cubes.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** This recipe asks for ricotta salata. This is not the fresh ricotta that you find at any grocery store in a container, but rather an aged cheese that can be grated like Parmesan. If you can't find ricotta salata, you can substitute with Pecorino Romano or Parmesan cheese.



# Potato Gnocchi

PREP TIME: **20** minutes | COOK TIME: **40** minutes

Gnocchi are those famous soft Italian dumplings, simply made with potatoes and flour. Here are my suggestions for learning the art of making gnocchi. First, to make soft gnocchi, use the least amount of flour possible, without them falling apart when cooking. Second, do not overcook the potatoes or they will absorb water. The more water in the potatoes, the more flour will be needed, and the chewier the gnocchi will be. Third, mash the potatoes while they are still hot, otherwise they will have a grainy texture. You can dress your gnocchi with your favorite sauce, like Bolognese, tomato, or a simple brown butter and sage sauce. **SERVES 4**

## DAIRY-FREE

## VEGETARIAN

**2 pounds russet potatoes (or another baking potato)**

**Salt**

**1 egg**

**1 cup all-purpose flour**

**Semolina flour (optional)**

- 1.** Wash and scrub the potatoes under running water. Place in a large pot of cold, salted water and bring to a boil. Simmer until fully cooked, from 20 to 30 minutes depending on size. Test the potatoes with a fork to see if you can pierce all the way through.
- 2.** Promptly remove the potatoes from the water, remove the skin, and pass them through a ricer into a large bowl.
- 3.** Add the egg and the flour and mix quickly, adding more flour as needed. Don't pack or over mix, just combine until the dough holds together.
- 4.** Move the dough to a clean, lightly floured counter. Working in batches, roll the dough into a rope about ½-inch thick. Cut the gnocchi into ½-inch pieces. Place the gnocchi in a single layer on a baking sheet that is lightly floured (use semolina flour, if you have it).

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- 5.** In a large pot over high heat, bring salted water to a boil. Drop the gnocchi in 3 or 4 batches. Let the water come back to a boil, and simmer on medium-low for 1 more minute. Remove the gnocchi when they rise to the surface, and gently toss with your favorite sauce.

**PREPARATION TIP:** Right after cutting the gnocchi you can roll each *gnocco* gently against the tines of a fork or the back of a traditional grater to make ridges. This gives gnocchi their famous shape, which helps cradle the sauce and make it stick more to the gnocchi.

**SERVING TIP:** One of my favorite dressings for gnocchi, and the easiest to make: Melt 4 tablespoons unsalted butter in a large skillet with 8 fresh sage leaves. As soon as it sizzles, add the gnocchi and toss. Sprinkle with lots of freshly grated Parmesan cheese. Gently toss and serve.

# Gnocchi alla Sorrentina

PREP TIME: **30** minutes | COOK TIME: **1** hour, **55** minutes

This dish from Sorrento is one that will test your self-control. Imagine a bubbling-hot bowl of gnocchi that you know will burn your tongue and palate, but it looks and smells so good that you can't wait to take the first bite. I go for that scorching-hot-but-amazing first bite every time! This recipe requires only a few ingredients: the best potato gnocchi you can roll, the best tomato sauce you can simmer, and the best fresh mozzarella you can find. Oh, and don't forget fresh basil and Parmesan cheese. As simple as that! **SERVES 4**

## VEGETARIAN

2 pounds Potato Gnocchi  
(page 74)

3 cups Basic Tomato  
Sauce (page 54)

8 ounces fresh  
mozzarella  
cheese, diced

10 fresh basil leaves

½ cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese

1. Prepare the Potato Gnocchi and the Basic Tomato Sauce.
2. In a large pot over high heat, bring salted water to a boil, reduce to medium-low and cook the gnocchi in 2 or 3 batches. When the gnocchi start to float, remove them with a strainer and toss in the pan with the tomato sauce.
3. Add most of the mozzarella cubes, well drained from their water, and the basil broken in pieces. Toss gently and quickly.
4. Divide the gnocchi into 4 oven-safe bowls. Top with the remaining mozzarella and Parmesan cheese.
5. Bake in the preheated oven at 400°F for 15 minutes. Serve when hot and bubbly.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Confession: I've made *gnocchi alla sorrentina* with store-bought gnocchi when I've craved this dish and didn't have time to make gnocchi from scratch. It's not the same as homemade, but it is still pretty delicious if you can find good-quality gnocchi from the refrigerated section of your grocery store.

# *Bigoi in Salsa*

## Pasta with Anchovy Sauce, Venetian Style

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PREP TIME: 5 minutes | COOK TIME: 15 minutes

For all those times the refrigerator is empty and everyone is starving, this traditional Venetian pasta is a perfect last-minute meal that needs only anchovies (traditionally sardines), onions, olive oil, and *bigoi*, a type of Venetian thick spaghetti pasta made with whole wheat. **SERVES 4**

### **30 MINUTES OR LESS**

#### **DAIRY-FREE**

#### Salt

12 ounces thick spaghetti

or bucatini pasta

¼ cup extra-virgin

olive oil

2 large onions, chopped

4 ounces canned anchovy

fillets in olive oil and

salt, drained

2 tablespoons chopped

fresh parsley

- 1.** In a large pot over high heat, bring salted water to a boil, reduce the heat to medium-high, and cook the pasta according to the package directions.
- 2.** Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large sauté pan or skillet over medium heat and sauté the onion, stirring often, for 10 minutes, or until the onions are soft and slightly golden. Add some of the water from the pasta, if needed.
- 3.** Drain the anchovies from the oil and add them to the skillet. Cook for a few minutes while breaking them up with a wooden spoon. Turn off the heat if the anchovies are ready before the pasta.
- 4.** Drain the pasta and toss into the skillet with the sauce. Add the parsley and a tablespoon of pasta water, if needed. Serve immediately.





*Pizza with Burrata Cheese and Fresh Tomatoes* PAGE 83



# 6

## PIZZA AND BREAD

**M**aking bread and pizza dough is an art to be enjoyed: from the soothing pleasure of kneading, to the mouthwatering aroma of freshly baked goodness coming out of the oven. It is a deeply rewarding activity that transforms a few simple ingredients into something magical. The most important key factor in making bread is patience. Dough needs time, lots of time, to sit and rise. The more time you give it, the better the bread or pizza will be.

In this chapter I will show you a few different recipes, from bread to pizzas, and by no means is this a complete list of what you can do with dough. If you've ever been to a *panificio* in Italy you know what I'm talking about. There are so many choices of shapes, flavor, texture, all with a different level of crunchiness and amount of *mollica*. See? Italians even have a name for the soft, inner part of a loaf. This might just be one of the many signs that indicate how important bread is in the Italian culture.

**Tip:** To measure flour, spoon it into the measuring cup and level it with your finger or a knife. If you pick up the flour with the measuring cup, you will pack it and scoop up too much flour. Weighing the flour is always the best and easiest way to be sure you have the right amount: 1 cup of flour corresponds to 4.6 ounces or 130 grams.

# Homemade Pizza Dough

PREP TIME: **20** minutes | INACTIVE TIME: **2½** hours or longer

Here is a simple recipe with a sure result. To make this pizza dough, use half all-purpose flour and half bread flour. Add sugar, which helps activate the yeast, and salt only at the end because it limits the yeast effect. Timing is fundamental to the success of this recipe. Let the dough rise for a few hours, or until it doubles in size. It could take no more than 2 hours in a warm temperature or closer to 3, if it's colder. As a rule of thumb, if I plan to make the pizza for dinner, I prepare the dough right after lunch, at the latest. **MAKES 2 (12-INCH) PIZZAS; ½ PIZZA = 1 SERVING**

## VEGETARIAN

2 cups bread flour

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 (¼-ounce) packet

active dry yeast

(2¼ teaspoons)

1 teaspoon sugar

1½ cups warm

water, divided

2 teaspoons salt

1. In a large bowl, combine the bread flour, all-purpose flour, yeast, and sugar. Add 1 cup of water and mix with your fingers or a spoon.
2. Add the salt to the remaining ½ cup of water. Mix well to dissolve completely. Add the remaining water to the dough and mix it in the bowl until the dough comes together into a ball. It should still be slightly sticky, soft, and easy to knead. Add more warm water if it's too hard, 1 tablespoon at a time. Or, add a little more flour if it's too soft.
3. Transfer the dough to a clean counter sprinkled with flour. Knead with your hands, using your palm to push down and forward. Knead for at least 5 minutes, or until the dough becomes elastic and less sticky.
4. Place the dough back in the bowl, sprinkle it with flour, and cover it with plastic wrap. Cover with a clean kitchen towel, and let it sit in a non-drafty area for about 2 hours, or until it doubles in size.
5. Knead the dough for 1 minute and divide it in half. Roll each half in a ball, and let rise for another 30 minutes, or until it's ready to be rolled out and baked.

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**INGREDIENT TIP:** If you have fresh yeast, you can substitute 1 ounce fresh yeast for the active dry yeast. You will need to activate it before using it by adding it to ½ cup warm water, mixing, and letting it sit for 5 minutes. Add to the rest of the flour.

**COOKING TIP:** One fundamental key to making a good pizza is to bake it at the hottest temperature possible. Wood-fired ovens give pizza a fantastic flavor and bake it in no time with a crispy crust and few charred spots. Unfortunately, most of us do not own a pizza oven, so we have to work with what's available.

Preheat your regular oven to its highest temperature. Place a pizza stone or baking steel grid inside. Before the pizza is fully baked, broil it for a couple of minutes to get charred spots on the crust. Alternatively, you can grill the pizza in your outdoor grill. This is probably my favorite method, especially in the summer. I use my baking steel griddle inside the grill, and heat it as high as it goes. Another alternative is to cook directly on the grill, in which case the dough needs to be drizzled only with oil at first, flipped once after 1 minute, topped with tomato sauce and cheese, and then grilled on a lower flame until ready.

# Pizza Margherita

**PREP TIME: 25** minutes | **INACTIVE TIME: 2½** hours or longer |  
**COOK TIME: 15** minutes

Here is the all-time favorite pizza Margherita: a simple tomato sauce, mozzarella, and basil pizza. To make it a little more special you can use mozzarella di bufala. **MAKES 2 (12-INCH) PIZZAS; ½ PIZZA = 1 SERVING**

## VEGETARIAN

### Homemade Pizza Dough (page 80)

1½ cups tomato sauce

Dried oregano

8 ounces fresh

mozzarella cheese, cut  
into cubes and drained

12 fresh basil leaves

1 tablespoon extra-virgin  
olive oil

1. Preheat the oven to 500°F, with a pizza stone or a baking steel griddle inside, if you have one.
2. On a clean and lightly floured counter, or directly on parchment paper, roll the dough into 2 (12-inch) round pizzas, using your hands. The easiest way is to press down with the palm of your hand around the dough and stretch it out carefully, trying not to break holes through it. If you like, oil your hands so that the dough won't stick as much.
3. Spread the tomato sauce on top. Sprinkle with oregano to taste, then transfer to the pizza stone or griddle and bake for 8 minutes.
4. Top with mozzarella and bake for another 8 minutes or until the crust is nice and golden, and the mozzarella is mostly melted.
5. Remove from the oven, top with basil leaves, drizzle with olive oil, cut in slices, and enjoy!

# Pizza with Burrata Cheese and Fresh Tomatoes

**PREP TIME:** 25 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 2½ hours or longer |

**COOK TIME:** 15 minutes

If you've never tried burrata before, what are you waiting for? Burrata is the gorgeous sister of mozzarella. It's a cheese originally from Puglia with the same look, texture, and flavor of fresh mozzarella on the outside, but filled with soft and creamy cheese inside. It's best to add burrata after the pizza has been fully baked and it's still very hot so that the cheese will just partially melt. Of course, if you can't find burrata, you can replace it with fresh mozzarella or mascarpone cheese. This pizza is also delicious with only fresh tomatoes, no sauce. You can add a few slices of prosciutto and/or a handful of arugula when you add the burrata at the end. **MAKES 2 (12-INCH) PIZZAS; ½ PIZZA = 1 SERVING**

## VEGETARIAN

Homemade Pizza Dough  
(page 80)

½ cup cherry tomatoes

Salt

1 cup tomato sauce

Dried oregano

8 ounces burrata cheese

12 fresh basil leaves

1 tablespoon extra-virgin  
olive oil

1. Preheat the oven to 500°F, with a pizza stone or a baking steel griddle inside.
2. On a clean and lightly floured counter, or directly on parchment paper, roll the dough into 2 (12-inch) round pizzas, using your hands.
3. Cut the cherry tomatoes in half, removing most of the seeds and juice. Salt to taste and toss.
4. Spread the tomato sauce on top of the pizza. Sprinkle with cherry tomatoes and oregano to taste. Transfer to the stone or griddle, and bake for about 15 minutes or until the crust is crispy and golden.
5. Add the burrata cheese only after the pizza is fully baked. Top with basil broken in pieces, and a drizzle of olive oil. Cut in slices and enjoy!

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Have fun with the pizza toppings. But please make sure not to put too much. Italian pizzas are light and not overly dressed with toppings.



# Panzerotti

## Fried Stuffed Pizza

**PREP TIME:** 20 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 3 hours | **COOK TIME:** 20 minutes

*Panzerotti* are typical street food originally from Puglia, but very popular all over Italy. They look like small *calzoni*, but panzerotti are fried, not baked. They can be eaten as an appetizer, or a few of them as a main dish. **SERVES 4**

### VEGETARIAN

1 cup all-purpose flour

2 cups bread flour

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 teaspoon sugar

1 (¼-ounce) packet

active dry yeast

(2¼ teaspoons)

1½ teaspoons salt, plus  
more for seasoning

1 cup warm water

8 ounces fresh

mozzarella

cheese, diced

2 cups canned diced  
tomatoes

Freshly ground

black pepper

Dried oregano and/or

fresh basil leaves

Vegetable oil for frying

1. In a bowl (or mixer) add the all-purpose flour, bread flour, oil, sugar, yeast, and salt. Mix to combine.
2. Gradually add the water while mixing until your dough comes together into a soft ball. Add more water, if necessary. The dough should be slightly sticky, soft, and easy to knead. Mix for several minutes with the food processor, or move to the counter and knead with your hands until smooth and elastic. Make into a ball, place the dough back in the bowl, sprinkle with flour, and cover with plastic wrap and a kitchen towel. Wait for at least 3 hours, or until doubled in size.
3. Divide the dough into 12 balls about the same size. In a colander mix the mozzarella and tomato cubes with salt, pepper, oregano and/or fresh basil cut in small pieces. Let the filling sit for at least 15 minutes so the water drains out. You want the least amount of liquid in the filling to keep the dough dry when frying.

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4. In a large pan, heat enough vegetable oil to reach ½-inch in depth over medium-high heat. Roll out each dough into a disc, about 8 inches in diameter. Add a big spoonful of filling in the middle of the rolled-out dough. Don't overfill the panzerotto or it might explode during frying. Lightly brush half of the edge of the pizza dough with water. Fold the dough in half, into a half-moon shape. Press and pinch the edges between your thumb and finger and gently roll the edge on itself to seal. Drop in the hot oil (folded side down first) and fry turning once, until both sides are golden and puffy. Serve when hot.

**COOKING TIP:** When rolling the dough, don't make it too thin or it might break when handling. Fry the panzerotti right after stuffing them, otherwise they will become soggy and too messy to fry.

**VARIATION TIP:** For a healthy variation, you can air-fry these panzerotti if you own an air fryer. Simply brush with olive oil and bake at 400°F for 8 minutes or until golden on top.

# Gnocco Fritto

## Fried Homemade Bread

**PREP TIME:** 30 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 3 hours | **COOK TIME:** 15 minutes

*Gnocco fritto* is a pillowy fried bread served as an appetizer next to a platter of cured meat and cheese. Even though the name refers to gnocchi, this recipe has nothing to do with potato dumplings. Traditionally made and fried in lard, it's also excellent made with oil, like in my recipe. **MAKES ABOUT 30 PIECES; 5 PIECES = 1 SERVING**

**DAIRY-FREE**  
**VEGETARIAN**

2 cups bread flour  
1 teaspoon active  
dry yeast  
¼ teaspoon sugar  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
¼ cup milk  
½ cup warm water  
Vegetable oil or lard  
for frying

1. In a large bowl, combine the flour, yeast, sugar, and salt. Mix to combine.
2. Make a well in the middle, add the oil, milk, and water and start mixing with a spoon, fork, or your fingers. Add more water if necessary, 1 tablespoon at a time, while mixing until you have a soft dough.
3. Transfer the dough to a lightly floured counter and knead for about 5 minutes, until smooth and elastic. Make into a ball, place in the bowl, cover with plastic wrap and a kitchen towel and let rest for at least 2 hours until it doubles in size.
4. Flour the counter and roll out the dough into a square about ½ inch thick. Fold it in three parts (like a letter). Wrap again and let rest for one hour.
5. Roll out the dough into a thin layer (about ⅛ inch thick). Cut with a fluted pasta wheel or sharp knife into 3-inch diamonds or squares.
6. In a deep pan over medium-high heat, heat enough oil to reach 1 inch in depth. When hot, fry the gnocchi in batches. Use a spoon to carefully wet the top of the gnocchi with the oil. Watch it inflate, wait about 1 minute, flip, and let it cook on the other side. Do not over crowd the pan because the gnocchi will need space to inflate. Transfer to a plate lined with paper towel. Serve hot.

# Rosemary Focaccia Bread

PREP TIME: **15** minutes | INACTIVE TIME: **3** hours | COOK TIME: **25** minutes

Focaccia makes the perfect side dish for a yummy cheese and cut-meat appetizer, or slice it up and stuff it for your favorite sandwich or if you are like me, just eat it up by itself for a yummy snack. It's that good!

**MAKES 1 (9-BY-12-INCH) FOCACCIA; SERVES 6 TO 10**

## **DAIRY-FREE VEGAN**

3 cups bread flour  
1 (¼-ounce) packet  
active dry yeast  
(2¼ teaspoons)  
Pinch sugar  
3 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive  
oil, divided  
Leaves from 3 rosemary  
sprigs, chopped  
2 teaspoons salt, plus  
more for seasoning  
1¼ cups warm water  
¼ teaspoon  
coarse salt

- 1.** In a large bowl, combine the flour, yeast, sugar, 2 tablespoons of olive oil, most of the chopped rosemary leaves, and salt. Add the warm water to the bowl while mixing with a fork or your finger until most of the flour is absorbed. The dough will be quite soft and sticky. If the bowl is large enough, knead in the bowl, or transfer to a clean and lightly floured counter and knead for a few minutes. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and a kitchen towel. Keep it in a warm place and let rise for about 1½ hours.
- 2.** Line a 9-by-12-inch baking pan with parchment paper. Place the dough on the paper, and stretch it out with your fingers. Sprinkle with the remaining chopped rosemary and drizzle with the remaining olive oil. With your finger, punch some holes (every 2 inches or so) on top of the dough. Cover again and let rise for another 1½ hours, or so.
- 3.** Preheat the oven to 400°F. Sprinkle the top lightly with the coarse salt and bake the focaccia for about 25 minutes, or until slightly golden on top. Cut in squares and serve warm or at room temperature.

# Focaccia Bread with Cherry Tomatoes

PREP TIME: **15** minutes | INACTIVE TIME: **4** hours | COOK TIME: **45** minutes

This recipe is similar to the Rosemary Focaccia Bread (page 87). Just like in that recipe, the dough needs to be highly hydrated for a soft and porous result. Add a riced potato to the dough for extra structure and moisture. For the top, you can add olives in addition to or in place of the tomatoes. **MAKES 1 (9-BY-12-INCH) FOCACCIA; SERVES 6 TO 10**

**DAIRY-FREE**  
**VEGETARIAN**

1 medium russet  
potato, peeled  
Salt, plus 2 teaspoons  
for dough and more  
for seasoning  
3 cups bread flour  
1 (¼-ounce) packet  
active dry yeast  
(2¼ teaspoons)  
Pinch sugar  
2 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive oil  
1 cup plus 2 tablespoons  
warm water  
12 ounces cherry  
tomatoes on the vine  
½ teaspoon  
dried oregano

1. In a small pan, cover the potato with cold, salted water, and bring to a boil. Simmer until soft, about 20 minutes or so. Check with a fork for doneness.
2. In a large bowl, combine the flour, yeast, sugar, 1 tablespoon of olive oil, and salt. Rice the potato when still hot into the bowl. Add the water to the bowl while mixing with a fork or your finger until most of the flour is absorbed. The dough will be quite soft and sticky. Knead in the bowl, or with a mixer. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and a kitchen towel. Keep it in a warm place and let rise for about 1½ hours.
3. Cut the cherry tomatoes in half, and squeeze them to remove most of the seeds. Toss in a bowl with salt, oregano, and the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil.
4. Line a 9-by-12-inch baking pan with parchment paper. Place the dough on the paper, and flatten it down with your fingers. Add the tomatoes on top of the focaccia, spreading them out evenly and pushing down into the dough with your finger. Cover again and let rise for another 1½ hours, or so.
5. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Sprinkle the top with more oregano and a drizzle of olive oil if you like. Bake the focaccia for about 25 minutes, or until slightly golden on top. Cut into squares and serve.



# Garlic Rolls

PREP TIME: **15** minutes | INACTIVE TIME: **2** hours | COOK TIME: **20** minutes

Fragrant and soft rolls flavored with spicy garlic, oregano, and olive oil, just like the garlic rolls from your favorite Italian restaurant.

**MAKES 16 SMALL ROLLS**

## VEGETARIAN

**1¾ cups bread flour**  
**1 cup all-purpose flour**  
**1 (¼-ounce) packet active dry yeast (2¼ teaspoons)**  
**1 teaspoon sugar**  
**1 cup warm water, divided**  
**1½ teaspoons salt**  
**2 tablespoons butter**  
**2 tablespoons olive oil**  
**3 garlic cloves, minced**  
**1½ teaspoons dried oregano**

- 1.** In a large bowl, combine the bread flour, all-purpose flour, yeast, and sugar.
- 2.** Add ¾ cup of warm water while mixing. Add the salt and the remaining ¼ cup of warm water. Mix until the dough comes together into a ball. Add more water if it's too hard, or more flour if it's too soft.
- 3.** Knead the dough for a few minutes until smooth and elastic. Make into a ball, sprinkle with flour, and cover with plastic wrap and a kitchen towel. Let rise for at least 1 hour.
- 4.** Transfer the dough to a clean and lightly floured counter, and cut into 16 mostly equal pieces.
- 5.** Roll each piece into a small ball and place in an oven pan (10½-inch round) lined with parchment paper. Leave some space around each roll. Let the rolls rest 1 more hour.
- 6.** Preheat the oven to 425°F. Melt the butter and brush the rolls. Bake for about 12 minutes. In a small bowl, combine the olive oil, minced garlic, and oregano. Brush the rolls, and bake for 5 more minutes or until golden brown on top.

# Ciabatta Bread

**PREP TIME:** 20 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 6 hours | **COOK TIME:** 25 minutes

Originally from the Veneto region, this bread loaf has a flat, rectangular look, a lightly crunchy crust, and a soft and porous crumb. The texture comes from a highly hydrated dough, and a soft pre-fermented starter. For this recipe I make a poolish, which is a very soft mixture of flour, warm water, and yeast, which is fermented for a minimum of 2 hours and is then used to make the dough. This bread is perfect for slicing and making into a sandwich, dunking into soup, or tasty enough by itself, if you ask me. **MAKES 2 CIABATTA LOAVES OR 6 CIABATTA ROLLS**

**DAIRY-FREE**  
**VEGAN**

## **FOR THE POOLISH:**

1 cup bread flour  
½ cup all-purpose flour  
½ teaspoon active  
dry yeast  
1 cup warm water

## **FOR THE DOUGH:**

2 cups bread flour  
1 cup all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon active  
dry yeast  
1 teaspoon sugar  
1 cup warm water  
2 teaspoons salt  
¼ cup semolina flour

## **TO MAKE THE POOLISH:**

In a bowl, mix the bread flour, all-purpose flour, and yeast. Add the water and mix with a fork until smooth. This will be very soft and easy to mix. No need to knead. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature for 3 hours, or longer.

## **TO MAKE THE DOUGH:**

1. In a bowl, mix the bread flour, all-purpose flour, yeast, and sugar.
2. Add half the flour mixture to the bowl with the poolish, and mix. Add ½ cup of the warm water while mixing. When combined, add the remaining flour mixture and the remaining ½ cup warm water. You can mix with a spoon, a stand mixer, or a handheld mixer. You can use your hands but know that the dough will be very sticky.
3. Add the salt and mix for 8 to 10 minutes. Cover with plastic wrap, and let rise for at least 2 hours or until doubled in size.
4. Transfer the soft dough to a clean counter sprinkled with semolina flour. Divide the dough in halves, or in six equal parts if you'd like to make

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sandwich rolls. Gently roll each in the semolina flour and fold the dough over itself by pulling each of the sides over the top.

5. Transfer the dough onto parchment paper sprinkled with semolina flour. Shape the dough into 2 big rectangles or 6 small squares. Sprinkle each piece generously with semolina flour, cover loosely with the plastic wrap, and let rest for 1 hour.
6. Preheat the oven to 450°F with a baking stone inside, if you have it. Spray the inside of the oven with water. Bake for 8 minutes. Spray again with water and lower the temperature to 375°F and bake for another 8 minutes. Keep the oven door slightly open with a wooden spoon and bake for another 8 minutes, or until the bread is lightly golden on the top.

**COOKING TIP:** If the room temperature is particularly cold (during winter months), let the dough rise in the oven (turned off) with the oven light on.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Polish versus Biga: Polish and biga are both pre-fermented mixtures of flour, water, and yeast that can be used in the preparation of bread or pizza dough. Both take only a few minutes to prepare with very little mixing. They use a small amount of yeast and a long fermentation time, which yield a bread with a great texture and more flavor, and which is more easily digested. Polish is a much softer mixture that requires less time to ferment but more yeast. Biga has a longer ferment time, but uses less yeast. Which method to use depends on the time available and the type of bread you'd like to bake.

# *Pane Rustico*

## Pugliese Rustic Bread Loaf

**PREP TIME:** 15 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 14 hours | **COOK TIME:** 45 minutes

Here is a rustic loaf, or *pane pugliese*, that will make your kitchen smell like heaven. This is the famous big round loaf of bread with a crunchy and deep golden crust and moist inner crumb. It's denser than a ciabatta bread, and perfect to slice and make into bruschetta, crostini, or your favorite sandwich. This recipe calls for a biga, a pre-fermented dough that gives extra flavor and great texture to the bread. And it calls for higher-protein flour, which translates into higher gluten that absorbs more water, making the dough more elastic and giving it more volume and crumb structure. **MAKES 1 LARGE LOAF**

**DAIRY-FREE**  
**VEGAN**

### **FOR THE BIGA:**

2 cups bread flour  
¼ teaspoon dry yeast  
¾ cup warm water

### **FOR THE DOUGH:**

1 cup stone-ground white  
whole-wheat flour  
1 cup bread flour  
½ teaspoon dry yeast  
1 cup water  
1½ teaspoons salt  
¼ cup semolina flour

### **TO MAKE THE BIGA:**

In a bowl, combine the flour and yeast. Add the warm water and mix quickly with a fork or your fingers for 1 to 2 minutes. The dough will be very soft and very easy to mix. Cover with plastic wrap and a kitchen towel. Let it sit at room temperature overnight or for at least 12 hours. If not using after 12 hours, refrigerate until you're ready to make the bread. Make sure to bring back to room temperature before using.

### **TO MAKE THE DOUGH:**

1. Mix the biga in the bowl, and add the stone-ground flour, bread flour, yeast, and water a little at a time.
2. Mix with your fingers or using a stand mixer fitted with the hook, if you have one. When the dough is combined, add the salt and mix some more. The dough should be wet and sticky.
3. Transfer the dough to a clean counter sprinkled with flour and knead for several minutes until smooth and elastic.

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4. Make it into a ball, place the dough back in the bowl, sprinkle it with flour, and cover with plastic wrap and a kitchen towel. Let it rest for 3 hours, or until it's doubled in size.
  5. Sprinkle the counter with semolina flour, and gently pull out the dough from the bowl and place it on the flour. Sprinkle semolina on top. With your hand, gently roll the dough around the flour, deflating it a little but keeping it in a ball shape. Roll it a few times on itself. This will help make the crust extra crunchy.
  6. Give shape to the dough, place on parchment paper (on a wooden board or baking sheet). Sprinkle with more flour. Cover with the upside-down bowl. Let rise for another hour.
  7. Preheat the oven to 450°F, placing a pizza stone inside (if available). Using a sharp knife, cut a deep cross or four crossing lines (tic-tac-toe style) into the top of the dough. Bake for 15 minutes at 450°F. Leaving the bread inside, lower the temperature to 400°F and bake for another 20 to 25 minutes or until deep golden on top. Keep the oven door slightly open with a wooden spoon or a potholder for the last 5 minutes, to let the steam out. Remove from the oven and let the bread cool down over a cooling rack. Slice and enjoy.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** The amount of water added to the dough depends on the type of flour you use. Not all types or brands of flour absorb water in the same way. Make sure to add a little flour at a time and adjust, if needed.

**COOKING TIP:** When cutting the dough before baking (called scoring) make sure the knife or blade is very sharp. Use a confident and swift cut, without pressing down on the dough too much. These deep cuts allow the steam to escape from the bread while it is baking, so the bread can expand in a controlled shape and won't crack.





*Milanese-Style Veal Shank* PAGE 98



# 7

## MEAT AND POULTRY

In this chapter, I present you with some of my favorite secondi piatti of beef, chicken, pork, veal, duck, and lamb. From grilling, to frying, to braising, you will see that no matter what the cooking method is, when you have good-quality meat, few other ingredients are needed. A drizzle of olive oil, a splash of wine, a couple of garlic cloves, and the most common Italian herbs can yield the most tender, flavorful, and satisfying dish.

When buying meat, make sure to look at the colors: light to bright red for beef, pale pink for veal, pink to light red for pork and lamb, and the fat needs to be bright white in all cases. Stay away from yellow fat, and purple or brown meat, or packages with too much juice, which are all signs of cuts coming from old animals, or product that is going bad.

For a lot of recipes in this chapter, beef, veal, chicken, and pork are easily interchangeable. You can use your choice of meat in a similar cut, and possibly adjust the cooking time. As a rule of thumb, you don't want to overcook beef or veal or it might get chewy and tough, while you don't want to undercook chicken or pork for obvious safety reasons.

# *Saltimbocca alla Romana*

## Roman-Style Veal Scaloppine

**PREP TIME:** 15 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 15 minutes

*Saltimbocca*, which means “jumps in the mouth,” is a traditional secondo piatto from Rome. Wait until you start simmering these cutlets: The tantalizing aromas of the sage, prosciutto, and wine will flood your kitchen and will surely make your mouth water. *Saltimbocca* are quite easy to make, and as the name suggests, they are even easier to eat. **SERVES 4**

### 30 MINUTES OR LESS

8 veal scaloppini, thinly sliced (about 1 pound)

8 slices prosciutto

8 fresh sage leaves

½ cup all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided

Salt

½ cup white wine

1. Prepare the meat by pounding it between sheets of plastic wrap or parchment paper so that it has a uniform thickness.
2. Top each slice of veal with one slice of prosciutto and one sage leaf. Secure everything with a toothpick. Dredge the scaloppine in flour and shake off the excess.
3. In a large sauté pan or skillet, heat the olive oil and 1 tablespoon of butter over medium heat. When the butter is melted, add the veal and cook for 3 minutes on each side, or until slightly golden. If you don't have a skillet big enough for all the meat, cook in batches. When you flip the veal, lightly sprinkle salt on the bottom, not the side with the prosciutto since that's salty enough.
4. Drizzle the wine into the skillet (or half of the wine if you are cooking in 2 batches) and let it evaporate. Transfer the saltimbocca to an oven-safe serving plate with its sauce, and keep warm in the oven. Cook the rest of the meat if needed.

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5. Add the last tablespoon of butter to the skillet and let it melt while scraping loose any bits from the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon. Pour the sauce over the saltimbocca and serve. Don't forget to remove the toothpick or remind your guests about it.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** If your cutlets are small, just cut the prosciutto to size and top each piece with a sage leaf. In this case, you will need more than 8 cutlets to serve 4.

# Ossobuchi alla Milanese

## Milanese-Style Veal Shank

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **1½** hours

This is a staple dish of Milano that you find in most fancy Italian restaurants in the United States. *Ossobuco* translates to “bone with a hole,” referring to the way the veal shanks are cross-cut into 1-inch-thick slices so that the bone marrow, which is a delicacy, is visible. This is one of my go-to dishes when I have guests over. This fork-tender meat braised in wine with veggies takes only about 1½ hours to prepare with very little supervision and effort, and can be made ahead of time. **SERVES 4**

1 tablespoon olive oil  
4 tablespoons  
butter, divided  
4 veal shanks, 1 inch thick  
1 medium onion, chopped  
1 large carrot, chopped  
1 tablespoon  
all-purpose flour  
½ cup white wine  
1 cup water or broth  
1 tablespoon  
tomato paste  
Salt  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
1 tablespoon chopped  
fresh parsley  
Finely grated zest of  
½ lemon

1. In a large pan or Dutch oven, heat the oil with two tablespoons of butter over medium-high heat. When the butter is melted, add the veal shanks and brown for 2 minutes on each side.
2. Add the onion and carrot to the pan with the veal, and cook over medium heat for 4 minutes, stirring occasionally and flipping the veal.
3. Sprinkle the flour over the veal shanks, and turn the meat around once or twice so that the butter absorbs the flour.
4. Drizzle the white wine, water or broth, and tomato paste into the pan. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
5. Cover the pan and cook over medium-low heat for 1¼ hours or until the meat is tender. Check every 15 minutes, to turn the meat over and to make sure there is liquid in the pan. Add some water if necessary.



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- 6.** Place the ossobuchi on a serving plate. Add the parsley, lemon zest, and remaining 2 tablespoons of butter to the pan. Cook over high heat for 1 minute, while mixing the sauce. Pour over the ossobuchi and serve.

**COOKING TIP:** Make sure to pat the meat dry with paper towels before cooking. Meat browns better with less moisture.

**VARIATION TIP:** Substitute beef shanks for the veal, and cook for 30 extra minutes.

# Pollo alla Cacciatora

## Hunter's Chicken Stew

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **50** minutes

Here is the classic rustic chicken stew with tomatoes and wine sauce just as Italian hunters have been known to make. You can add some dried oregano or fresh basil at the end if you like, for a nice pop of color and flavor. **SERVES 4**

### DAIRY-FREE

### GLUTEN-FREE

3 tablespoons olive oil  
1 whole chicken, cut into  
8 pieces  
1 medium onion, chopped  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
1 sprig rosemary  
1 cup dry white wine  
1 teaspoon salt  
¼ teaspoon freshly  
ground black pepper  
1 (14-ounce) can crushed  
tomatoes

1. In a large pan, heat the oil over medium-high heat for 1 minute. Add the chicken pieces, a few at a time, and brown on all sides, about 3 or 4 minutes per side.
2. Remove the chicken from the pan and set aside. Add the onion, garlic, and rosemary and sauté over medium-low heat until the onion is tender, about 5 minutes. Stir occasionally.
3. Add the chicken pieces back to the pan together with the wine. Add salt and pepper. Simmer for 5 minutes uncovered to let the wine evaporate. Turn the chicken once halfway.
4. Add the crushed tomatoes and mix in. As soon the sauce starts to bubble, cover the pan and let the chicken cook over medium-low heat for 30 minutes or until cooked through. Check every once in a while, adding water if needed. If the sauce is too liquid, cook uncovered for the last 5 minutes. Serve hot with bread or polenta.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** If no one likes to eat the chicken breast, as is the case in my house, swap in 4 chicken thighs and drumsticks for the whole chicken. Everyone will be happy.

# Polpette al Sugo

## Meatballs in Tomato Sauce

**PREP TIME:** 20 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 45 minutes

You can never go wrong with a nice plate of meatballs. In Italy meatballs are generally served as a secondo piatto, with vegetables on the side and a slice or two of fresh bread to soak up all the sauce. There are several ways to make meatballs. Here is the most traditional and well-known. For this recipe you can use any type of ground meat that you prefer. Beef would be the traditional choice, but these are also great with ground veal or pork, or any combination of the three. **SERVES 4**

1 pound ground meat  
1 egg  
2 tablespoons  
  freshly grated  
  Parmesan cheese  
¼ cup milk  
1 tablespoon chopped  
  fresh parsley  
Salt  
½ cup bread crumbs  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1½ cups Basic Tomato  
  Sauce (page 54)  
Dried oregano

1. In a large bowl, combine the ground meat, egg, Parmesan cheese, milk, parsley, and salt. Mix with a fork (or your hand) until well combined. Add the bread crumbs a little at a time to get a smooth, soft, and slightly sticky mixture. Spoon some of the mixture and roll it between the palms of your hands, shaping into meatballs about the size of an egg, but round. You should end up with 18 to 20 meatballs.
2. In a pan, heat the oil over medium heat and add the meatballs. Brown on each side, carefully turning them over often.
3. Add the tomato sauce and flavor with dried oregano, to taste. Cover the pan and simmer for about 20 minutes or until the meatballs are fully cooked. Add a little water if the sauce is too dense. Season with salt if needed and serve.

**STORAGE TIP:** These can be stored in the refrigerator, covered, for up to 3 days . . . that's assuming you have any leftovers!

# Polpette Fritte

## Fried Meatballs

PREP TIME: **15** minutes | COOK TIME: **20** minutes

These small, round, and crispy *polpette* are fantastic served with lemon wedges on the side, a green salad, and roasted potatoes for a scrumptious weeknight dinner that the kids will love. These also make a great two-bite finger food next to a yummy dipping sauce for your next party. **SERVES 4**

2 slices white bread

¼ cup milk

3 tablespoons

freshly grated

Parmesan cheese

1 egg

Salt

1 pound ground meat

(beef, pork, or veal)

½ cup bread crumbs

Vegetable for frying

1. Remove the crusts from the bread slices and break into small pieces. Add the bread pieces to a bowl and pour in the milk. Let rest for a couple of minutes so that the bread absorbs the milk.
2. With a fork or your fingers, break the bread into tiny pieces. Add the Parmesan cheese, egg, salt, and ground meat. Mix with a fork, or your hand, keeping the mixture soft.
3. Spoon out some of the mixture at a time and roll it between the palms of your hands, without pressing too hard. Make meatballs about the size of golf balls.
4. In a sauté pan or skillet, pour enough oil to cover the bottom of the skillet and heat the oil over medium-high heat. Roll the meatballs in the bread crumbs and cook for 3 minutes on each side, turning only when golden. Lower the heat to medium and cook for another 5 to 10 minutes, depending on size, turning occasionally, until fully cooked. Drain on a paper towel, and serve hot or warm.

# Cotoletta alla Milanese

## Milanese-Style Veal Chop

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **15** minutes

This tender on the inside, crunchy on the outside breaded and perfectly golden cutlet is a staple of Milanese cuisine. Traditionally it is made with veal, but chicken can be substituted. In Milano you can find two variations: a *costoletta* which is made with a 1-inch-thick, bone-in veal cutlet, or an *di elefante* (elephant ear), which, as the name suggests, is an extra-large and super-thin cutlet with no bone. Either way, it's crispy, crunchy, and a favorite of children. **SERVES 4**

### 30 MINUTES OR LESS

4 bone-in veal cutlets,  
1 inch thick

2 eggs

1 cup bread crumbs

2 tablespoons olive oil

½ cup (1 stick)

unsalted butter

Salt

1 lemon, cut into wedges

1. Beat the eggs well in a shallow bowl. One at a time, dip the cutlets in the eggs and bread crumbs, patting down to coat the cutlets well on both sides.
2. In a large sauté pan or skillet over medium-high heat, heat half of the oil and half of the butter until the butter is sizzling. Working in batches of two cutlets at a time, cook the cutlets over medium heat for about 6 or 7 minutes per side, or until golden and cooked through. Repeat for the remaining 2 cutlets. Season with salt and serve with a lemon wedge.

**COOKING TIP:** To ensure the *impanatura* (coating) will stay on while cooking, dry the meat before coating it with egg and bread crumbs. Do not add salt to the meat or the eggs before cooking. Be sure to heat the butter and oil until they are hot, and turn the meat only once.

**VARIATION TIP:** If making *di elefante*, buy veal cutlets with no bone, and pound them until very thin. Follow the same steps, but cook for only 1 to 2 minutes per side.



# Brasato al Barolo

## Beef Stew Braised in Barolo Wine

**PREP TIME:** 15 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 3 hours | **COOK TIME:** 2½ hours

This typical dish from Piedmont doesn't require much hands-on work. Just let the meat simmer in wine, smell the mouthwatering aroma coming from the pan, and watch the "wine magic" happen. If you can't find Barolo, use another hearty red wine. It doesn't have to be expensive, but it should be a good wine. This is a great recipe to make ahead of time for a special lunch or dinner. It's delicious served with soft or grilled polenta, or roasted potatoes. **SERVES 4**

2 cups Barolo wine  
6 fresh sage leaves  
1 sprig rosemary  
4 bay leaves, divided  
6 whole cloves, divided  
2 pounds beef  
    chuck roast  
3 tablespoons  
    all-purpose flour  
3 tablespoons  
    extra-virgin olive oil  
2 tablespoons butter  
2 onions, diced  
4 celery stalks, diced  
2 carrots, diced  
Salt  
Freshly ground  
    black pepper

1. In a large glass bowl, combine the wine, sage, rosemary, 2 bay leaves, and 2 whole cloves. Add the beef, mix to coat, and cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Let the mixture marinate for 3 hours or up to 1 full day. Turn the meat halfway through that time.
2. Remove the beef from the bowl, pat dry with paper towels, and coat with flour. Reserve the marinade for later use.
3. In a large Dutch oven, or in a heavy pot with a tight-fitting lid, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Cook the meat in batches to brown on all sides. Remove the meat and set aside.
4. To the same pan, add the butter, onions, celery, and carrots. Add the remaining bay leaves and cloves and sauté for 3 minutes on medium heat, stirring frequently.
5. Add ½ cup of the reserved marinade wine to the pan, scraping up the brown bits from the bottom with a wooden spoon.

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- 6.** Return the meat to the pan and season with salt and pepper. Add the remaining marinade wine and simmer at low heat, covered, for 2 to 2½ hours or until the meat is very tender, checking occasionally and mixing. Season with salt and serve.

**COOKING TIP:** This is a great recipe for a slow cooker, too. Cook on high for 4 hours or on low for 8 hours.

**LEFTOVER TIP:** Braised dishes taste even better the following day when their flavors have had time to mingle. Leftovers make a yummy sauce for fresh tagliatelle or other pasta. Shred the meat with a fork into medium pieces, keep all the sauce, and toss with pasta.

# Scaloppine al Marsala con Funghi

## Marsala Scaloppine with Mushrooms

PREP TIME: 5 minutes | COOK TIME: 20 minutes

For this recipe you can use any cutlets you like: veal (as is traditional), pork, chicken, or turkey. Just make sure the *scaloppine* is cut thin so that it cooks in no time. If you don't like mushrooms, no problem. Skip them and enjoy your scaloppini al Marsala with other veggies on the side. **SERVES 4**

### 30 MINUTES OR LESS

4 thinly sliced boneless,  
skinless chicken  
breast cutlets, about  
1½ pounds  
¼ cup all-purpose flour  
2 tablespoons butter  
3 tablespoons olive  
oil, divided  
8 ounces mushrooms,  
cleaned and sliced  
1 garlic clove, crushed  
8 fresh sage leaves  
½ cup dry Marsala wine  
½ cup water  
Salt  
Freshly ground  
black pepper

1. Pat the chicken cutlets dry, dredge them in flour, and shake off the excess.
2. In a large sauté pan or skillet, heat the butter and 2 tablespoons of oil over medium heat. When sizzling, add the chicken and cook for 3 minutes per side. Remove the cutlets and set aside. If only 2 cutlets fit in your pan, cook in 2 batches, adding only 1 tablespoon of butter and 1 tablespoon of oil each time.
3. Add the mushrooms to the skillet with the garlic, sage, and 1 tablespoon of oil, if needed. Sauté over medium-high heat for 5 minutes, mixing occasionally.
4. Add the Marsala and water. As soon as it starts to simmer, return the cutlets to the pan. Season with salt and pepper and cook for 5 minutes or until the Marsala is reduced by half and the sauce is nice and dense.
5. Remove the sage and garlic, transfer to a serving plate, and enjoy.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Marsala is a fortified wine from Sicily with a deep and rich flavor. It can be sweet or dry. I like to use dry Marsala for this recipe.

# Cosce d'Anatra Brasate

## Braised Duck Legs

PREP TIME: 5 minutes | COOK TIME: 90 minutes

This recipe is very easy to prepare. It takes 90 minutes to cook, but requires little effort. The duck cooks in the white wine sauce without needing much attention. While you wait, you can prepare a side dish. I like to serve this with roasted potatoes and green beans. It's also great with soft or grilled polenta. If you can't find duck legs, you can buy a whole duck, cut it in pieces, and cook it the same way. **SERVES 4**

### DAIRY-FREE

### GLUTEN-FREE

2 tablespoons olive oil

3 garlic cloves, crushed

3 bay leaves

12 black olives, pitted  
and chopped

1 rosemary sprig

4 whole duck legs,  
trimmed of excess fat

Salt

Freshly ground  
black pepper

2 cups white wine

1. In a large pot or Dutch oven, heat the oil with the garlic, bay leaves, olives, and rosemary, and sauté for 1 minute over medium heat.
2. Add the duck legs and sauté for a few minutes on each side until brown. Salt and pepper to taste. Add the white wine and bring to a boil.
3. Cover the pan and cook for about 1 hour and 15 minutes (or longer for bigger legs). Check and turn the legs over every 20 to 30 minutes. You should have plenty of liquid when cooking duck from all the fat in the skin, so don't worry about the meat sticking to the bottom of the pan. Check with a fork for doneness before serving.

**LEFTOVER TIP:** When I make this dish, I generally double up the recipe and use any leftover duck meat the following day to make duck *ragù* to serve with pasta or lasagna. Simply shred the meat using a fork. Cook the pasta and toss with the leftover sauce, shredded meat, and 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley, if you like. Sprinkle with freshly grated Parmesan cheese and serve. *Buonissimo!*

# Scottadito alla Romana

## Roman-Style Grilled Lamb Chops

**PREP TIME:** 5 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 30 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 10 minutes

These “finger burning” (*scottadito*) lamb chops are a simple Roman dish flavored with fresh mint and rosemary. It’s a common dish served for Easter, but I think it’s too good to be enjoyed just once a year. Serve these hot from the grill when tender and juicy. Eat them with your hands, but watch those fingers! **SERVES 4**

**DAIRY-FREE**

**GLUTEN-FREE**

2 garlic cloves, sliced  
3 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive oil  
1 tablespoon chopped  
fresh rosemary leaves  
1 tablespoon chopped  
fresh mint leaves  
1 teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon freshly  
ground black pepper  
12 lamb chops

1. In a glass bowl large enough to hold the lamb chops, add in the garlic, oil, rosemary, mint, salt, and pepper. Mix to combine.
2. Add the lamb chops and coat well. Let marinate for 30 minutes or longer.
3. Heat the grill or a grilling pan on high flame. Add the lamb chops and cook for about 5 minutes on each side, until nicely brown on the outside and barely pink in the center. Season with salt, if needed, and serve hot.

**SERVING TIP:** Serve with lemon wedges on the side, roasted potatoes, green beans, or a green salad.



# Brasato di Maiale alla Birra

## Beer-Braised Pork Stew

PREP TIME: 15 minutes | COOK TIME: 1 hour 45 minutes

This cozy and hearty stew is a great secondo piatto or entrée for any weeknight dinner. Cooking with beer is a traditional technique of Trentino-Alto Adige. The beer, just like wine, gives a tender and flavorful result. Use your favorite pale or brown ale, which will infuse its flavor into the meat. **SERVES 4**

### DAIRY-FREE

2 tablespoons olive oil, divided  
1½ pounds boneless pork shoulder or country-style pork chops, cut into ½-inch cubes  
1 large onion, diced  
1 celery stalk, chopped  
4 carrots, diced  
¼ cup water  
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon sugar  
1 rosemary sprig  
4 fresh sage leaves  
Salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
2 cups beer  
½ cup chicken broth

1. In a large Dutch oven, or a heavy and deep pot with a tight-fitting lid, heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the meat a little at a time and cook for about 2 minutes on each side, or until the meat is brown on all sides. Transfer to a bowl.
2. Add 1 tablespoon of oil to the Dutch oven, together with the onions, celery, and carrots diced in medium-size pieces. Sauté for 3 minutes on medium heat, stirring frequently.
3. Add the water, and scrape up the brown bits from the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon.
4. Mix in the flour and cook for 1 minute.
5. Add the browned pork, sugar, rosemary, sage, salt, and pepper. Add the beer and broth and bring to a boil.
6. Cover the pan and simmer over low heat for 1 hour and 30 minutes or until tender. Stir occasionally, adding more broth if needed and simmering with the lid open if there's too much liquid. Season with salt and serve.

**VARIATION TIP:** You can substitute boneless beef shoulder or chicken breast for the pork. If using chicken, you only need to cook for about 30 minutes.

# Spezzattino di Pollo all'Arrabbiata

## Chicken Stew all'Arrabbiata

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **35** minutes

This secondo piatto is inspired by the Roman *penne all'arrabbiata*, "angry pasta," which is an easy-to-make pasta with a spicy and garlicky tomato sauce. To make this chicken stew raving mad, I use spicy dried peperoncini. The key word here is hot! The seeds inside the peperoncini are what gives the burning effect. Use 2 or more, based on how spicy you like it. Make sure to have lots of garlic and tomato sauce, and don't forget to serve with a slice or two of bread to soak up the sauce. **SERVES 4**

**DAIRY-FREE**  
**GLUTEN-FREE**

2 tablespoons olive oil  
3 garlic cloves, crushed  
1½ pounds chicken breast, cut into 1-inch cubes  
½ cup white wine  
1 (14.5-ounce) can crushed tomatoes  
3 peperoncini, broken in half and crushed  
Salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

1. In a large pan, heat the oil with the crushed garlic cloves over medium-high heat. Sauté for 30 seconds and add the chicken cubes.
2. Brown the chicken on all sides for a couple of minutes.
3. Drizzle with the wine and cook until the wine has mostly evaporated.
4. Add the crushed tomatoes and crushed peperoncini. Salt and pepper to taste. Cook over medium heat for 15 to 20 minutes.
5. Sprinkle with the parsley and serve.







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# 8

## FISH AND SEAFOOD

**W**hen thinking about Italian food, pizza and pasta are the first things that pop into everyone's minds. But fish and seafood, in all their sizes, shapes, and exquisite forms, play a major role in Italian cuisine, from north to south. This should come as no surprise if we look at Italy's characteristic boot shape, graciously lying in the middle of the sea. This long, skinny country is surrounded by water on all three sides, from the Adriatic, to the Tyrrhenian, Ionian, and Mediterranean Seas. Therefore, most Italian regions are blessed with lengthy stretches of spectacular coastline and easy access to what the sea has to offer.

As with the rest of this book, the recipes in this chapter focus on a few fresh ingredients, and simple preparations that allow the natural beauty and flavor of the seafood to shine. Of course, what a fish market in Italy has to offer is not always the same as what we find here in the United States. So, my suggestion for you is to visit your local fish market, find the best catch available that day, and use it for these recipes. Fresh and simple will always shine!



# *Insalata di Polpo e Patate*

## Octopus and Potato Salad

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **30** minutes

Here is a wholesome, fresh, and summery seafood salad, which tastes great both warm or at room temperature. I like to use baby octopus for this recipe, which takes very little time to cook. If you can't find baby octopus, adjust the cooking time based on the weight. Drizzle the salad with lemon juice, or add a handful of black olives for a yummy variation. **SERVES 4**

**DAIRY-FREE**  
**GLUTEN-FREE**

1 pound potatoes  
Salt  
2 pounds frozen  
cleaned baby octopus,  
defrosted  
2 garlic cloves, sliced  
2 tablespoons chopped  
fresh parsley  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
4 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive  
oil, divided

1. Wash and scrub the potatoes under running water. In a large pot of cold, salted water, bring the potatoes to a boil. Simmer until fully cooked, for 20 to 30 minutes, depending on size. Test with a fork to make sure the inside is fully cooked. Slice each potato in half, remove the skin and cut in large cubes.
2. Meanwhile, bring another large pot of salted water to a boil. Simmer the baby octopus for 20 minutes, or until tender. Let the octopus cool down in the water.
3. In a large serving bowl, combine the sliced garlic cloves, chopped parsley, and olive oil. Add the potatoes and the octopus cut into bite-size pieces. Toss, salt to taste, and add extra olive oil, if needed.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Cooking time for octopus depends on its size. A small baby octopus is ready after only 15 to 20 minutes of boiling, while a larger octopus needs 20 minutes for each pound of weight. Test the cooked octopus with a sharp knife in the middle where the legs meet the head. If it can easily be pierced, it's ready. Octopus will shrink considerably when cooking, so 2 pounds is the minimum amount you will need for 4 servings.

# Polpo alla Griglia

## Grilled Octopus with Vegetables

**PREP TIME:** 15 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 30 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 30 minutes

Grilled octopus over vegetables is a delectable appetizer or secondo piatto. Octopus needs to be boiled and fully cooked before grilling. Toss with garlic and parsley and flavorful extra-virgin olive oil, and you're in for a wholesome treat. **SERVES 4**

**DAIRY-FREE**  
**GLUTEN-FREE**

Salt, plus more for seasoning  
2 pounds frozen cleaned baby octopus, defrosted  
1 medium eggplant, cut into ½-inch-thick slices  
3 zucchini, cut into ½-inch-thick slices  
5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided  
Freshly ground black pepper  
3 garlic cloves, sliced, divided  
3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley  
1 lemon, cut into wedges

1. In a large pan, bring salted water to a boil, add the whole octopus, and cook until tender. (See Ingredient Tip, page 114).
2. Brush the eggplant and zucchini slices with 2 tablespoons of olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Preheat a grilling pan over medium-high heat. Grill the vegetables in batches for about 3 minutes per side, or until tender and lightly charred.
3. Cut the grilled vegetables in smaller pieces, arrange them in an oven pan with 1 garlic clove sliced, and 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Keep warm in the oven.
4. Drain the octopus and cut into large pieces. In a bowl, combine with the remaining 2 cloves of garlic sliced, 2 tablespoons parsley, and 2 tablespoons olive oil. Let rest for 15 minutes.
5. In the grilling pan over medium heat, grill the octopus for 3 minutes per side, or until lightly charred. Serve on top of the vegetables, sprinkled with the remaining 1 tablespoon parsley and with lemon wedges on the side.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Octopus is one of the few seafoods that is better when bought frozen. Fresh octopus can be very rubbery and needs to be tenderized. The freezing and thawing process does the job. Also, frozen octopus has generally been cleaned already. One less job to do!

# Calamari Ripieni

## Stuffed Calamari

PREP TIME: **20** minutes | COOK TIME: **30** minutes

I love calamari because they are relatively inexpensive, quite versatile, and very tasty. Plus, the tubes make perfect pouches to fill. You will find this stuffing extremely delicious, made by using the tentacles of the squid, bread crumbs, and, of course, garlic and parsley. Stuffed calamari can be served as an appetizer, if small, for a fancy dinner party. Bigger calamari are more adequate as an entrée and are faster to work with. **SERVES 4 TO 6 AS AN ANTIPASTO, OR 3 OR 4 AS A SECONDO PIATTO**

**2 slices white bread**

**2 tablespoons milk**

**4 tablespoons olive oil, divided**

**2 garlic cloves, divided**

**1 pound calamari, tentacles and tubes, cleaned**

**3 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley, divided**

**Salt**

**½ cup plain bread crumbs**

**1 egg**

**2 tablespoons white wine**

- 1.** Remove the crust from the bread and cut into small cubes. In a bowl, pour the milk over the bread and let the bread absorb it.
- 2.** In a medium saucepan, heat 2 tablespoons of oil over medium-high heat with 1 minced garlic clove. Add the tentacles, cut into small pieces. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes. Add 2 tablespoons of parsley and season with salt. Let the calamari simmer for a couple of minutes. Squeeze out the bread, removing any extra milk. Add it to the pan, together with the bread crumbs, and mix well. The mixture should have a dense consistency. If it's too soft, you can cook it a little longer or add more bread crumbs.
- 3.** Remove the saucepan from the stove. Add the egg and mix.
- 4.** Fill the calamari tubes with the mixture using a piping bag or a small spoon. Don't fill completely but about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way. Seal the opening with a toothpick.

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5. In a large sauté pan or skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of oil and 1 garlic clove cut in half or crushed. Place the stuffed calamari in the skillet and cook for 2 minutes. Turn them over and cook the other side for another 2 minutes. Add the white wine and cook for 2 more minutes.
  6. Sprinkle with salt and more parsley, then cover and simmer for 20 to 25 minutes, or until tender. Keep in mind that bigger calamari require a little longer to cook.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Calamari shrink when cooking and might pop. Don't worry if that happens. Serve the filling that comes out on the side. It's not as pretty but still buonissimo!

# Corze Gratinata Pugliesi

## Baked Stuffed Mussels

PREP TIME: **20** minutes | COOK TIME: **20** minutes

Here is a classic dish from Puglia. For this recipe I like to sauté the mussels quickly before stuffing, rather than using a knife to open the shells. This way, it's easy to see if there are any bad mussels that need to be discarded. **SERVES 4**

### DAIRY-FREE

Salt

2 pounds fresh mussels,  
cleaned (see Ingredient

Tip, page 11)

2 garlic cloves, divided

1 small bunch fresh  
Italian parsley, divided

¼ cup white wine

1½ cups plain  
bread crumbs

½ cup freshly  
grated Pecorino  
Romano cheese

2 eggs

3 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive  
oil, divided

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. In a large pot, combine the mussels, 1 crushed garlic clove, a parsley sprig (no need to chop), and the white wine. Cover and cook over medium-high heat for 3 to 4 minutes until the mussels open. Don't overcook. Throw away any mussel that did not open.
2. In a bowl, mix the bread crumbs, grated cheese, eggs, 1 tablespoon of chopped fresh parsley, and the remaining 1 garlic clove, minced. Salt to taste and add 1 tablespoon of olive oil and some of the cooking juices from the mussels, 1 tablespoon at a time, until the mixture is wet.
3. Throw away the empty halves of the shells. Stuff the mussels with the filling, and place them in one layer on a baking pan. Drizzle with olive oil.
4. Bake in the upper part of the oven for 15 minutes or until the top is crispy and golden.

**VARIATION TIP:** You can swap in Parmesan cheese for the pecorino. If you end up with too much stuffing, cut some small cherry tomatoes in half, remove the seeds, stuff with the filling, and bake together with the mussels. These make a yummy side dish.



# *Sogliola alla Mugnaia*

## Sautéed Dover Sole with Lemon

**PREP TIME:** 5 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 15 minutes

Sole fillets are such a delicate and versatile fish, with a light and moist texture. In this recipe the fish is simply pan-fried in butter and served with parsley and lemon. A sure crowd-pleaser. **SERVES 4**

### **30 MINUTES OR LESS**

1 cup milk

½ cup all-purpose flour

1½ pounds Dover  
sole fillets

2 tablespoons olive oil

4 tablespoons butter

Salt

2 tablespoons chopped  
fresh parsley

Juice of 1 lemon

- 1.** Pour the milk and flour into individual deep plates. Dip the fillets into the milk, and dredge in flour, shaking off any excess.
- 2.** In a large sauté pan or skillet, heat the oil and 2 tablespoons of butter over medium-high heat. When sizzling, add the fillet and cook over medium heat for 3 to 4 minutes per side. Don't let the butter burn. Carefully flip the fillets and cook for 3 to 4 minutes until golden brown. Salt to taste.
- 3.** Remove the fillets and place on a serving dish. Melt the remaining butter in the skillet over medium-high heat and add the parsley and lemon juice. When sizzling, pour the sauce over the sole fillets and serve.

# Zuppa di Pesce

## Fish Stew

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **35** minutes

This *zuppa* (soup) is really not a soup. It's a secondo piatto that can be found in most regions of Italy with its local name and culinary tradition. It's a *brodetto* in Veneto, *caciucco* in Tuscany, or simply *zuppa di pesce* in Campania. This recipe was born of resourceful fishermen gathering all the unsold fish at the end of the day to make dinner. In Italy, you would traditionally find *scampi*, *seppie*, *scrofan*i, and *triglie*, which are not easily found in the US. Rather than looking for these, I recommend buying the best your fish market has to offer, as long as you have a good variety. Make sure to have some squid, shrimp, and/or sea scallops, clams and/or mussels, and fillets of firm-fleshed fish, cut into chunks that won't fall apart in the stew. Snapper, sole, halibut, or monkfish are all good choices. I recommend steaming the clams and mussels separately, and adding the seafood to the pot starting with what takes the longest to cook. Buonissimo! **SERVES 4**

### DAIRY-FREE

### GLUTEN-FREE

¼ cup olive oil

2 garlic cloves, crushed

½ small onion, chopped

1 peperoncino

Salt

1 (14.5-ounce) can crushed

San Marzano tomatoes

½ cup white wine

2 tablespoons chopped

fresh parsley, divided

Freshly ground

black pepper

4 pounds seafood

(variety of squid,  
shrimp or scallops,  
clams or mussels, or  
firm-fleshed fish)

1. In a large saucepan or Dutch oven, heat the oil over medium-high heat with the garlic, onion, peperoncino, and a pinch of salt. Cook for 2 minutes, stirring often.
2. Add the tomatoes, white wine, 1 tablespoon of parsley, and salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a simmer and reduce to medium heat for 10 minutes.
3. Add the squid and cook covered over medium-low heat for 10 minutes.
4. Add the firm-fleshed fish, shrimp, and sea scallops, and simmer covered over medium-low heat for 5 minutes.

- 
5. Meanwhile, in a separate large pan, add the cleaned clams and mussels. Cook covered for 3 minutes or until the shells open. Add the opened clams and mussels to the stew and discard the ones that did not open. If the tomato sauce is too dense, add some of the strained cooking liquid.
  6. Simmer for a few more minutes or until the fish is cooked and the sauce is nice and thick. Keep the pan covered or uncovered based on the look of your sauce. Season with salt and pepper. Top with more parsley and serve.

**SERVING TIP:** Serve the stew with rustic bread slices, drizzled with olive oil and grilled. Or serve it as we would in Veneto, with soft or grilled polenta.

**LEFTOVER TIP:** Use any leftover fish stew on your pasta the next day.

# Pesce Spada alla Siciliana

## Sicilian-Style Swordfish

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 20 minutes

This easy and flavorful recipe from Messina, is often called *pesce spada alla messinese*. This secondo piatto explodes with the Mediterranean flavors of tomatoes, oregano, capers, and olives. **SERVES 4**

### 30 MINUTES OR LESS

DAIRY-FREE

GLUTEN-FREE

3 tablespoons

extra-virgin olive oil

1 small onion, chopped

1 garlic clove, crushed

14 ounces cherry

tomatoes, halved or  
quartered

¼ cup pitted flavorful

olives, sliced

1 tablespoon capers,  
rinsed and drained

4 swordfish steaks

(about 6 ounces each)

Salt

1 teaspoon dried oregano

Freshly ground

black pepper

¼ cup white wine

1. In a large sauté pan or skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat and sauté the onion and garlic for 1 minute.
2. Add the tomatoes, olives, and capers. Cook over medium-high heat for 3 minutes.
3. Add the swordfish steaks to the pan. Sprinkle with the oregano, salt, and pepper to taste. Drizzle with the white wine and cook for about 5 minutes.
4. Carefully turn the steak over without breaking it. Salt and pepper to taste if needed and cook the other side for another 5 minutes, or until it easily flakes with a fork. Serve topped with the sauce from the pan.

**VARIATION TIP:** You can add 1 tablespoon pine nuts and/or 2 tablespoons raisins. Soak the raisins in hot water and add to the dish with the swordfish.

# *Filetti di Dentice al Cartoccio*

## Red Snapper Fillets Baked in Foil

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 30 minutes

*Al cartoccio*, “wrapped in paper,” is a great cooking technique that combines baking and steaming in the same easy-to-make dish. You can cook any fish this way, from whole fish to fillets, from cod to sole, from sea bass to salmon. And not just fish, but also meat or vegetables. All you need to do is wrap and tightly seal the ingredients in parchment paper and/or aluminum foil, and place it in the oven. The juices and flavors are all trapped inside the cartoccio while baking a delicious dish that can be served right in the paper. And the best part? No pots or pans to clean. **SERVES 4**

### **DAIRY-FREE**

### **GLUTEN-FREE**

4 red snapper fillets,  
about 6 ounces each

Salt

Freshly ground  
black pepper

2 garlic cloves, sliced

1 lemon, cut into  
thin slices

12 ounces cherry  
tomatoes

2 tablespoons chopped  
fresh parsley

2 tablespoons olive oil

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F. Place 4 pieces of brown parchment paper over 4 pieces of aluminum foil. Place one snapper fillet in the center of the paper. Season with salt and pepper on all sides.
2. Top with garlic and lemon slices. Add some cherry tomatoes (whole or halved). Sprinkle with chopped parsley and a drizzle of olive oil.
3. Fold the paper over and seal the packet. Now fold the aluminum foil on top and seal on all sides. Repeat for the other fillets.
4. Place the cartoccio over a baking sheet (to catch any spills), and bake for 20 minutes.
5. Remove from the oven and let rest in the sealed cartoccio for 5 minutes. Remove the aluminum foil and serve in the paper. Or, if you prefer, remove all and serve on a plate with all its juice.

**COOKING TIP:** Traditionally, only paper was used to wrap the fillets for baking. Aluminum foil is more convenient and easier to fold and, if closed properly, won't let out any spills. Brown parchment paper is prettier for serving and the fish will not stick to it. So, I like to use aluminum foil on the outside, and parchment paper on the inside.



# *Filetti di Branzino alla Genovese*

## Genoa-Style Branzino with Potatoes and Olives

PREP TIME: **15** minutes | COOK TIME: **40** minutes

Ligurian-style branzino is an amazing combination of soft potatoes, pine nuts, olives, parsley, and this mild and sweet white-fleshed fish fillet. For this recipe you can also use other white fish with a delicate flavor like sea bass, flounder, or tilapia. **SERVES 4**

### DAIRY-FREE

### GLUTEN-FREE

3 tablespoons

extra-virgin olive  
oil, divided

4 sea bass fillets, about  
1½ pounds total

Salt

Freshly ground  
black pepper

1 pound yellow potatoes  
(about 4), peeled and  
thinly sliced

12 Taggiasca or kalamata  
olives, pitted and sliced

¼ cup pine nuts

¼ cup dry white wine

1 tablespoon fresh  
lemon juice

1 tablespoon chopped  
fresh parsley

1. Preheat the oven to 450°F. Find an oven pan that can hold all 4 fillets in one layer, grease the pan with 1 tablespoon olive oil, and place the sea bass fillets in the pan. Season with salt and pepper on both sides.
2. Top the fish with a layer of potatoes. Sprinkle with salt.
3. Add the olives and pine nuts. Drizzle with the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, white wine, and lemon juice.
4. Bake in the oven for 35 to 40 minutes, or until fully cooked. The fillets should be opaque and should flake easily. Serve with fresh parsley, the potatoes, and juice from the pan.

# Polpette al Tonno

## Tuna Meatballs

**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 20 minutes

These easy-to-make “meatballs” are made with canned tuna instead of meat. Just like regular meatballs, they can be served for a fun appetizer or as a second dish. **SERVES 4**

### 30 MINUTES OR LESS

4 slices white bread  
½ cup milk  
16 ounces canned tuna in oil, drained  
2 tablespoons capers, rinsed and chopped  
2 eggs  
4 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese  
1½ cups plain bread crumbs, divided  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley  
Vegetable oil for frying  
Salt

1. Remove the crust from the bread. Break into pieces and place in a bowl with the milk to soak. Let rest for 5 minutes.
2. Squeeze out any excess milk from the bread and place the bread in a large bowl. Add the tuna, capers, eggs, Parmesan cheese, ½ cup bread crumbs, and parsley. Mix to combine.
3. With your hands lightly wet, roll some of the mixture between the palms of your hands to make golf ball–size balls. Makes about 30 meatballs. Roll each ball in bread crumbs.
4. In a large pan pour enough oil to reach ½ inch in depth. Heat the oil over medium-high heat. When hot, fry the tuna balls a few at a time until golden on all sides. Season with salt, if needed. Drain on paper towel and serve.

# *Salmone con Finocchio*

## Baked Salmon Fillets with Shaved Fennel

PREP TIME: 5 minutes | COOK TIME: 35 minutes

Flavorful, wholesome, easy, and quick to make, this salmon is baked over a bed of fennel and orange. You can swap salmon with swordfish, if you prefer. **SERVES 4**

### DAIRY-FREE

### GLUTEN-FREE

1 orange

2 small fennel bulbs,  
cleaned, cut in half, and  
thinly sliced

2 dill sprigs

Sea salt

Freshly ground  
black pepper

4 skinless salmon fillets,  
about 1½ pounds total

3 tablespoons olive oil

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Trim the orange by slicing the top and bottom off with a sharp knife. Shave off the peel with the knife, removing all the white pith and keeping only the orange flesh. Cut in quarters and slice.
3. Place the fennel, oranges, and dill in a baking dish. Season with salt and pepper and toss.
4. Season the salmon with salt and pepper. Place the fillets on top of the fennel and orange and drizzle with olive oil.
5. Cover the pan with aluminum foil and bake for about 20 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for another 10 to 15 minutes or until the salmon is cooked through.
6. Remove the dill sprigs, and serve each salmon fillet with some of the sliced fennel and orange.

**COOKING TIP:** Salmon is ready when the flesh is opaque and it flakes easily with a fork.

# Gamberoni alla Busara

## Venetian-Style Prawns in Tomato Sauce

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **25** minutes

The traditional Venetian recipe is *scampi alla busara*. But scampi are hard to come by and also quite pricey. So, when I still want to enjoy this dish, I use large prawns or shrimp, which also taste sweet and heavenly in the thick sauce. Serve with soft polenta and grilled bread. Scarpetta (soaking up the sauce with a piece of bread) is a must! **SERVES 4 TO 6**

**DAIRY-FREE**  
**GLUTEN-FREE**

3 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive oil  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
1 peperoncino, crushed  
½ onion, finely chopped  
Sea salt  
2 pounds shrimp or  
prawns, shell on and  
deveined  
½ cup white wine, divided  
1 (14.5-ounce) can San  
Marzano crushed  
tomatoes  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
2 tablespoons chopped  
fresh Italian parsley

1. In a heavy-bottom pan, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the garlic, peperoncino, onion, and a pinch of salt. When sizzling, add the shrimp, salt to taste, and cook for 2 minutes on each side.
2. Drizzle with ¼ cup of wine and cook for 2 minutes, or until the wine evaporates. Remove the shrimp and set it aside.
3. Add the crushed tomatoes, the remaining ¼ cup of wine, and salt to taste. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer for 10 minutes.
4. Return the shrimp to the sauce, and cook for 5 minutes. Turn off the heat, sprinkle with parsley, and serve.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** To remove the vein, use a sharp paring knife to cut along the back of the shrimp, cutting through the shell into the flesh to expose the vein. Use the tip of the knife to remove the vein.

**LEFTOVER TIP:** Use any leftovers to dress your pasta the next day or make a fabulous risotto.





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## VEGETABLES

**W**hen it comes to dinner planning, we often focus our entire cooking energy into the main entrées. That mouthwatering plate of *ossobuchi alla milanese* or the steamy bowl of *zuppa di pesce* for sure get all the attention at dinner. And for very good reasons. But what about those crispy green beans or sun-kissed ripe tomatoes? All the vitamin- and nutrient-rich gifts from nature that are so good for us should also have a prime position at the table.

With some of the recipes in this chapter, that's what you get. Trust me: These heavenly eggplant parmigiana or creamy potato lasagna dishes are bound to steal the spotlight and get everyone excited about vegetables.

# *Parmigiana di Melanzane*

## Eggplant Parmigiana

PREP TIME: **20** minutes | COOK TIME: **40** minutes

*Parmigiana di melanzane* is a simple and flavorful vegetarian dish that is well known all over the world. It's a spectacular combination of spicy eggplant and oregano, garlicky and tasty tomato sauce, fresh and melty mozzarella cheese, and a sprinkle (or a heaping) of Parmesan cheese on top, all in one baked dish. I like to make my Parmigiana in individual oven-safe bowls for a pretty presentation, but you can also use one large baking pan. **SERVES 4**

**GLUTEN-FREE**  
**VEGETARIAN**

1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 garlic clove, crushed  
1 (14.5-ounce) can  
crushed tomatoes  
Dried oregano  
Salt  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
1 large eggplant, cut into  
¼-inch-thick slices  
Vegetable oil for frying  
12 ounces fresh  
mozzarella, diced  
¼ cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
Fresh basil

1. To make the tomato sauce, heat oil in a small saucepan over medium heat. Add the garlic, tomatoes, oregano, and salt and pepper to taste. Simmer while you cook the eggplant.
2. In a sauté pan or skillet over medium heat, pour in enough vegetable oil to cover the bottom. When hot, fry the eggplant slices a few at a time. It takes only 3 or 4 minutes per batch. Add more oil if needed. Drain the fried eggplant on paper towels and sprinkle with salt.
3. To assemble the Parmigiana: Use 4 small, oven-safe bowls. Add 1 tablespoon of tomato sauce on the bottom, add one layer of eggplant, add another layer of tomato sauce, and a layer of fresh mozzarella.
4. Repeat the layers 2 more times, or until the ingredients are gone.
5. End with a layer of mozzarella and top with Parmesan cheese. Decorate with basil and more oregano.

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- 6.** Bake in the upper part of the oven at 400°F for 20 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and golden on top. Serve hot or warm, with 1 or 2 slices of fresh grilled bread.

**VARIATION TIP:** For a healthier version, bake the eggplant in step 2. Place the eggplant slices in a single layer on a baking sheet, or two if necessary, lined with parchment paper. Brush with olive oil and salt to taste. Bake at 425°F for about 20 minutes, turning the slices after 10 minutes. Alternatively, you can grill the slices over medium-high heat for a few minutes on each side until done.

# Caponata di Melanzane

## Sicilian Eggplant Stew

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **20** minutes

Eggplant *caponata* is a Sicilian sweet-and-sour version of the French ratatouille. It's a flavorful combination of eggplant, capers, and olives. It makes for a great appetizer served on toasted crusty bread, or the perfect side dish served with fried fish, as is common in Palermitan tradition. What I love about this recipe is that it can be made ahead of time. It is actually better when refrigerated overnight because eggplant is known to absorb all the flavors, which then intensify over time. You can add toasted pine nuts and/or raisins for a yummy variation. **SERVES 6**

### 30 MINUTES OR LESS

DAIRY-FREE

GLUTEN-FREE

VEGAN

¼ cup olive oil

1 large eggplant, diced  
into ½-inch cubes

1 medium onion, diced

2 celery stalks, diced

1 (14.5-ounce) can  
crushed tomatoes

Salt

2 tablespoons capers,  
rinsed and drained

20 pitted green olives

1. In a large pot, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the eggplant, onion, and celery, and cook for about 5 minutes, mixing often.
2. Add the crushed tomatoes and salt to taste. Cover, reduce the heat to medium-low, and simmer for 15 minutes or until the eggplant is tender, stirring occasionally. Add 1 or 2 tablespoons of water, if necessary.
3. Add the capers and olives. Mix and let cook uncovered for 2 more minutes.
4. For better flavor you can let the caponata cool down and refrigerate for 1 hour or up to 2 days.

**VARIATION TIP:** You can serve the caponata cold or at room temperature. You can dress it up with some fresh basil added before serving. I love to serve it next to burrata: The soft and delicate cheese perfectly complements the sweet-and-sour flavor of the caponata.

# Pomodori Gratinati

## Baked Tomato Gratin

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **45** minutes

Here is a light and tasty way to serve your tomatoes. Firm, ripe, and flavorful vine tomatoes are what I like to use for this recipe, but any size or variety works. **SERVES 4 TO 6**

### VEGETARIAN

6 firm, ripe tomatoes  
Salt  
¾ cup bread crumbs  
1 teaspoon dried oregano  
2 tablespoons chopped  
fresh parsley  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
Freshly ground  
black pepper  
¼ cup extra-virgin olive  
oil, plus 1 tablespoon  
½ cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Cut the tomatoes in half horizontally. Squeeze each half gently to remove the seeds, or scoop them out using a small spoon. Lightly salt the inside of the tomatoes and let them rest upside down to drain.
2. In a bowl, combine the bread crumbs, oregano, parsley, and garlic. Season lightly with salt and pepper. Add ¼ cup of the oil and mix.
3. Place the tomatoes cut-side up on a baking pan. Stuff with the prepared mixture. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese and drizzle with the remaining 1 tablespoon oil. Cover the pan with aluminum foil and bake for 30 minutes. Remove the foil, and bake in the upper part of the oven for 15 more minutes or until golden on top.



# *Pomodori Ripieni*

## Tomatoes Stuffed with Rice

PREP TIME: **15** minutes | COOK TIME: **50** minutes

This is the perfect dish for summer when you can find sunshine-ripe tomatoes that are deep red and flavorful. Use the inner part of the tomatoes to make a risotto. Add cheese and herbs, stuff the tomatoes, and bake.

*Pomodori ripieni* can be served as an appetizer or side dish (serves 6 to 8) or as a primo piatto or a main dish. **SERVES 6 TO 8 AS AN ANTIPASTO OR 4 AS A**

**PRIMO PIATTO**

**GLUTEN-FREE**  
**VEGETARIAN**

8 large vine-ripe tomatoes (about 4 pounds)  
4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided  
1 medium onion, chopped  
1 garlic clove, crushed  
1¼ cups Arborio rice  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil  
Salt  
6 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, diced  
⅓ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

1. With a sharp paring knife, cut the top ½ inch off each tomato, saving the tops for later. With a spoon, remove the pulp and seeds, saving the pulp in a bowl. Be careful not to break the outer part of the tomatoes. Lightly salt the inside and let the tomatoes rest upside down to drain.
2. Puree the tomato pulp with a blender. Pass through a sieve to remove the seeds, if needed.
3. In a large pan, heat 2 tablespoons of oil with the onion and garlic over medium-high heat. Sauté for 2 minutes.
4. Add the rice, and cook over medium-high while stirring for 2 minutes. Add the pureed tomatoes, reduce to medium-low, and salt to taste. Simmer the rice, stirring often, for about 15 minutes, or until the rice is cooked very al dente. Add hot water if needed.
5. Season with salt if needed. Remove the garlic and add the parsley, basil, mozzarella, and Parmesan cheese. Mix quickly to combine.

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- 6.** Place the tomatoes in an oven-safe dish, and stuff with the rice mixture. Drizzle with olive oil, and cover with the tomato tops. Bake in the preheated oven at 375°F for 30 to 40 minutes or until the tomatoes and rice are fully cooked. Serve hot, warm, or cold. It's scrumptious at any temperature.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Make sure to smell the tomatoes before buying, as I always do at the store or the farmers' market. Sniff right by the stem, and if you find tomatoes with an earthy and fresh aroma of sunshine and grass, you've got a winner.

# Peperonata

## Sautéed Peppers

**PREP TIME:** 5 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 30 minutes

Here is an appetizing side dish for meat or fish that is also exquisite all by itself over warm crostini. For this recipe you can use just red peppers, or any combination of red, yellow, or orange peppers to make it more colorful. **SERVES 4**

**DAIRY-FREE**

**GLUTEN-FREE**

**VEGAN**

3 large bell peppers (red, orange, yellow, or any combination)

6 tablespoons olive oil

1 large onion, cut in half and thinly sliced

2 garlic cloves, crushed

1 (14.5 ounce) can crushed tomatoes

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1. Wash the peppers and halve them lengthwise. Remove the stem and seeds, and slice lengthwise into ¼-inch wide strips.
2. In a large saucepan, heat the oil with the onion, garlic, and peppers. Cook over medium-high for 5 minutes. Lower the heat, cover and cook for 5 more minutes.
3. Add the crushed tomatoes, salt and pepper to taste, and simmer covered for 15 minutes or until the peppers are tender. Remove the garlic and serve.

**VARIATION TIP:** You can add some fresh basil at the end. This peperonata is also delicious tossed with your favorite pasta and a sprinkle of Parmesan cheese.

# Fagiolini alla Genovese

## Genoa-Style Green Beans

PREP TIME: 5 minutes | COOK TIME: 20 minutes

Here is a very simple yet flavorful green bean side dish. If you can't find anchovy paste, you can swap in 6 small anchovy fillets, finely chopped and mashed with a fork. **SERVES 4 TO 6**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**  
**GLUTEN-FREE**

Salt

1 pound green beans

2 tablespoons

extra-virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon butter

2 garlic cloves, cut into  
thin slices

¼ lemon, cut into thin  
half-moon slices

1 tablespoon  
anchovy paste

1 tablespoon chopped  
fresh parsley

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the green beans for 10 to 14 minutes, or until tender but still crisp, and drain.
2. In a pan, heat the olive oil with the butter over medium-high heat. When melted, add the garlic, the lemon, and the anchovy paste. Sauté for 2 minutes.
3. Add the green beans and toss, cooking for 5 minutes. Sprinkle with fresh parsley and serve.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** I love to buy the thinner French green beans, which are more tender and cook more quickly. When buying fresh green beans, make sure they are bright green, bruise-free, and crisp. So yes, bend one and make sure it snaps in half. To clean the green beans, trim both ends and remove the string. After boiling the green beans, drain and drop into a bowl filled with icy water. This will help them keep their nice green color.

# *Carciofi alla Romana*

## Roman-Style Artichokes

**PREP TIME:** 25 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 35 minutes

Fresh artichokes are a little time-consuming to clean and prepare, but I think the final result of this dish is worth the effort. There are several varieties of artichokes. Globe artichokes are sold throughout the U.S. most of the year. They are very large and great for making artichokes alla Romana or Carciofi alla Giudea (page 12). **SERVES 4**

**DAIRY-FREE**

**GLUTEN-FREE**

**VEGAN**

1 small bunch fresh mint,  
thinly sliced

1 garlic clove, minced

1 teaspoon dried oregano

Salt

Freshly ground  
black pepper

¼ cup extra-virgin  
olive oil

4 globe artichokes,  
cleaned (see Ingredient  
Tip, page 139)

1. In a small bowl, mix the mint, garlic, oregano, and salt and pepper to taste.
2. Season the outer part of the artichokes with salt and pepper. Add ¼ of the mixture inside the center of each artichoke.
3. Find a pan that fits the artichokes tightly inside. Add the oil and the artichokes, with the stuffed tops facing down and stems up. Cover with water until it reaches the bottom of the artichoke leaves.
4. Cover the pan and cook over medium heat until it starts to boil. Reduce to medium-low and cook for another 30 minutes, or until tender.



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**INGREDIENT TIP:** To clean fresh artichokes: Have a large bowl filled with cold water and a generous squeeze of lemon juice, about half a lemon, to help the artichokes keep their bright green color. You can rub your hands with the other half of the lemon, or wear gloves, so that your fingers will not turn brown. Work on one artichoke at a time: Remove the thick outer leaves, until you get to the lighter-green leaves inside. Trim and discard about ½ inch of the dry stem ends, and using a sharp knife or potato peeler, shave off the hard, outer layer of the remaining stem. Cut the tip of the leaves, removing 1 to 1½ inches from the tip. Remove the fuzzy choke from the center using a carving knife. Finish removing it all with a small spoon under running water to scrape out the remaining fuzz. Drop the artichoke in the bowl of water and repeat these steps for the rest of the artichokes.

**VARIATION TIP:** In this recipe you can swap some of the mint for fresh parsley, for a milder mint flavor. You can also add 1 teaspoon of dried oregano for extra flavor.

# *Insalata Calabrese di Patate*

## Calabrian-Style Potato Salad

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **25** minutes

Here is a spicy potato salad traditionally from Calabria. If you like, add some oil-cured black olives for a special treat. **SERVES 4**

**DAIRY-FREE**

**GLUTEN-FREE**

**VEGAN**

Salt, plus more for  
seasoning

3 large russet potatoes

5 tablespoons  
extra-virgin olive  
oil, divided

2 peperoncini, crushed

2 green bell peppers, cut  
into ½-inch-thick strips

½ medium red onion,  
thinly sliced

1 tablespoon white  
wine vinegar

Freshly ground  
black pepper

½ teaspoon  
dried oregano

1. In a large pot, cover the potatoes with salted, cold water. Bring to a boil and simmer for 25 minutes, or until tender. Test with a fork to see if they can be easily pierced all the way through. Drain, let cool for a couple of minutes, peel, and cut into cubes.
2. Meanwhile, heat a sauté pan or skillet with 2 tablespoons of oil and the peperoncini for 1 minute. Add the green peppers and sauté over medium-high heat, mixing often until lightly brown in spots and cooked. Sprinkle with salt.
3. In a salad bowl, combine the potatoes, red onion, and the peppers. Season with salt if needed. Drizzle with the remaining 3 tablespoons oil, and add the vinegar, ground black pepper, and oregano. Toss well and serve.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** When boiling potatoes, try to use similar-size potatoes so that they will cook uniformly.

# Patate Arroste

## Roasted Potatoes

**PREP TIME:** 5 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 30 minutes

These scrumptious oven-roasted potatoes with Italian herbs are one of the most versatile side dishes out there. They can be served next to most entrées, meat, or fish, for weeknight meals, or a fancy dinner. **SERVES 4**

**DAIRY-FREE**

**GLUTEN-FREE**

**VEGAN**

1 pound baby  
potatoes, halved  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
2 rosemary  
sprigs, chopped  
6 fresh sage  
leaves, chopped  
Salt  
Freshly ground  
black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F.
2. Arrange the potatoes in a baking pan large enough to hold them in one layer. Add the olive oil, garlic, rosemary, sage, and salt and pepper to taste and toss.
3. Roast, mixing occasionally, for 30 minutes or until golden and tender. The smaller the potato pieces, the quicker they will be ready. Season with additional salt, if necessary, and serve.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** Baby potatoes are my favorite for baking because they cook quickly. They don't require peeling, just a good scrubbing.

# *Pasticcio di Patate con Funghi*

## Potato Lasagna with Mushrooms

PREP TIME: **20** minutes | COOK TIME: **45** minutes

Chilly and rainy days are perfect for baking, especially when we are talking about a light, vegetarian, and wholesome lasagna stuffed with tender potatoes, sautéed mushrooms, and delicate besciamella sauce. And let's not forget: lots of cheese! In this recipe I use potatoes as the perfect pasta alternative: fat-free, gluten-free, sodium-free, cholesterol-free, and so good. **SERVES 4**

### VEGETARIAN

2 large potatoes, about  
10 ounces each, cut into  
 $\frac{1}{3}$ -inch-thick slices

Salt

1 garlic clove, crushed  
or minced

1 tablespoon olive oil

12 ounces mushrooms,  
washed and sliced

1 tablespoon chopped  
fresh parsley

Besciamella Sauce  
(page 57)

1 cup shredded  
mozzarella or  
Fontina cheese

4 tablespoons grated  
Parmesan cheese

1. In a pan, cover the potatoes with salty, cold water and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce to medium and cook for 10 to 12 minutes total, or until mostly cooked. Drain and set aside.
2. Meanwhile, in a large sauté pan or skillet, sauté the garlic in oil over medium-high heat for 1 minute. Add the mushrooms and cook for 10 minutes. Season with salt and parsley. Toss and set aside.
3. Preheat the oven at 375°F.
4. Using 4 individual oven-safe baking dishes, arrange the ingredients starting with a tablespoon of besciamella sauce on the bottom. Top with a layer of potatoes (about two slices per layer, per dish). Add some mushrooms ( $\frac{1}{4}$  of what you have for each dish), shredded cheese, and some more besciamella sauce.

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- 5.** Repeat with just one layer of potatoes, mozzarella cheese, and besciamella sauce. Top with 1 tablespoon of the Parmesan cheese, and bake in the upper part of the oven for about 15 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and the top is golden. Serve hot and melty.

**VARIATION TIP:** Just like for any lasagna, there's an unlimited number of options for ingredients. Just follow this basic recipe that replaces lasagna pasta with potato slices and let your imagination go. One alternative is substituting ham slices for the mushrooms and using a more flavorful cheese like *scamorza affumicata* or aged Gruyère cheese in place of the mozzarella cheese.





# 10

## DESSERTS AND DRINKS

**N**o meal is complete without something sweet to end it all. Whether it's a buttery and flaky cake, a nutty cookie, or a lick-your-bowl delicious *dolce al cucchiaio* "spoon dessert," I bet you won't be disappointed with any of these desserts. And please, don't forget about a favorite cocktail, to start or end your meal the Italian way.

When baking, there are two main things you should always keep in mind. First, properly measure the flour. I know the temptation is always there to grab the measuring cup, reach deep into the bag, dig out an overflowing cup of flour, and proudly level out the top with your finger. But oh no! Even though that is the easiest way, it's not really accurate. When you pick up flour with the measuring cup, you pack it down, ending up with much more than what the recipe is asking for. To properly measure flour, you need to spoon or pour it into the cup before leveling. Or even better, use any basic kitchen scale and weigh it out: 1 cup of flour weighs 4.6 ounces or 130 grams (if you are like me and can only think in metrics). This way, there is no room for error.

Second, get to know your oven. Oven temperature can vary a lot, and many factors can influence baking times. So, make sure to always keep your eyes open, and check a few minutes before the timer goes off, and double-check your dessert once it comes out of the oven. Let's put on the apron and get started.



# Tiramisù

**PREP TIME:** 20 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 3 hours or more | **COOK TIME:** 5 minutes

Every spoonful of this rich and smooth dessert combines the delicate flavor of the mascarpone cream with the bold flavor of coffee. As the name translates, it's a real "pick me up." You can make tiramisù in a casserole or baking dish, like I did for this recipe, or you can prepare it in individual goblets for easy serving. The choice is yours. **SERVES 12**

## VEGETARIAN

6 egg yolks

1 cup sugar

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup heavy cream

24 ounces

mascarpone cheese

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon

vanilla extract

8 ounces

savoardi cookies

2 cups brewed

coffee, cooled

1 tablespoon

unsweetened

cocoa powder

1. Heat the water in a double-boiler to a simmer. In a large bowl, blend the egg yolks and the sugar. Set the bowl over the simmering water so that the bottom of the bowl touches the hot water. Whisk continuously while scraping the sides and bottom of the bowl for about 5 minutes or until the cream thickens enough to form ribbons and sticks to the back of a spoon. Remove from the double-boiler and let it cool.
2. Whip the heavy cream to stiff peaks.
3. Add the mascarpone cheese and vanilla extract to the egg mixture. Blend well and fold in the whipped cream with a spatula or spoon.
4. Briefly soak 1 cookie at a time in coffee. Arrange 1 layer of cookies in a 9-by-13 inch pan, fully covering the bottom.
5. Spread half of the mascarpone cream on top.

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- 6.** Repeat with 1 more layer of cookies dipped in coffee and top with the rest of the cream. Smooth the top with a spatula or decorate with a fork. Sprinkle with the cocoa powder. Cover and refrigerate for at least 3 hours before serving.

**INGREDIENT TIP:** If you can't find Italian *savoardi* cookies, ladyfingers are a good substitute.

**COOKING TIP:** It's very important that the cookies do not soak for too long in the coffee or they will fall apart. But they should be moistened all the way through. So, dip 1 cookie at a time, turn it around, and quickly remove it from the coffee.

**VARIATION TIP:** For a child-friendly recipe, you can soak the *savoardi* in chocolate milk. Simply melt 3 ounces dark chocolate and whisk it into 2 cups milk.

# Panna Cotta with Berry Sauce

PREP TIME: 5 minutes | INACTIVE TIME: 3 hours | COOK TIME: 5 minutes

Panna cotta is laughably easy and fast to whip up. As the name suggests (“cooked cream”), it just involves bringing a mixture of heavy cream, milk, and only a couple of other ingredients to a slow boil. No baking needed! Top with your favorite sauce or fresh berries. **SERVES 4**

## GLUTEN-FREE

¼ cup whole milk  
1 (¼-ounce) envelope  
unflavored  
gelatin powder  
2 cups heavy cream  
½ cup plus  
2 tablespoons sugar  
1½ teaspoons  
vanilla extract  
8 ounces fresh berries  
1 tablespoon fresh  
lemon juice

1. Pour the milk into a small bowl and sprinkle with the gelatin powder. Stir and let stand for 5 minutes.
2. In a large pan, mix the heavy cream with ½ cup of the sugar. Bring to a light simmer over medium heat, but don't let the cream boil. As soon as the first bubbles appear on the sides, remove the pan from the heat. Stir in the vanilla extract and gelatin-milk mixture, and whisk until blended.
3. Pour the cream into 4 serving cups or glasses. Cool to room temperature and then refrigerate for at least 3 hours.
4. Before serving, purée the berries with the remaining 2 tablespoons sugar and the lemon juice. Pass through a sieve to remove the seeds. Top each cup with some of the berry sauce, or invert each panna cotta onto a plate and top with the sauce.

**VARIATION TIP:** Pour the cream into a glass bowl and place at a tilt so that the cream will set at an angle. You can fill the rest of the cup with fresh fruit or berry sauce for a presentation with a wow factor.



# Cantucci

## Biscotti

PREP TIME: 15 minutes | COOK TIME: 45 minutes

*Cantucci* (or *biscotti*, which just means “cookies” in Italian) are originally from Tuscany. As the name suggests (*bi* means “twice,” and *cotto* means “cooked”), these cookies are baked twice. They are traditionally enjoyed after dinner dunked in *vin santo*, a sweet, intensely fragrant and flavorful dessert wine. I personally eat them at any time of the day, dipped in cappuccino, latte, tea, and, why not, sweet wine. You should try it, too.

MAKES 12 COOKIES

### VEGETARIAN

2 eggs

½ cup sugar

4 tablespoons unsalted  
butter, melted

⅛ teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon

vanilla extract

Zest of ½ lemon

2 cups all-purpose flour

½ teaspoon

baking powder

1 cup toasted

whole almonds

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. In a large bowl, whisk the eggs with the sugar until light.
2. Add the melted butter, salt, vanilla extract, and lemon zest. Stir some more.
3. Mix in the flour and the baking powder. Fold in the almonds.
4. Place the dough on the prepared baking sheet. Sprinkle with flour and shape into a flat log about 2½ inches wide. Bake for 25 minutes, or until lightly golden around the edges.
5. Remove from the oven and let cool for 10 minutes. Place on a cutting board and, with a sharp, serrated knife, cut diagonally into ½-inch-wide cookies.
6. Place them cut-side down on the baking sheet. Bake for 10 minutes, flip them, and bake for another 10 minutes, or until golden brown on both sides.

**VARIATION TIP:** Melt some chocolate and dip the biscotti halfway in. Place back onto the baking sheet and allow the chocolate to set at room temperature or in the refrigerator.

# Pasticcini alle Mandorle

## Almond Cookies

PREP TIME: **10** minutes | COOK TIME: **20** minutes

Almond *pasticcini* are a traditional Sicilian pastry, but are common in every part of Italy. There are a few variations of these cookies. You can make them with only almonds, or you can add little extras like pistachios, orange extract, or candied cherries. In this recipe I added lemon zest, just like they do in Puglia. If you try these, I'm sure you'll fall in love, too, with the flavor combination of almonds and lemons. It's truly a match made in heaven. **MAKES 15 COOKIES**

**30 MINUTES OR LESS**

**DAIRY-FREE**

**GLUTEN-FREE**

2 cups almond flour

$\frac{2}{3}$  cup granulated sugar

$\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon salt

Finely grated zest

of 1 lemon

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

$\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon

almond extract

2 egg whites

$\frac{1}{4}$  cup confectioners'

sugar, for dusting

15 whole almonds

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. In a bowl, combine the almond flour, granulated sugar, salt, and lemon zest.
3. Add the vanilla extract, almond extract, and egg whites. Mix with a spoon until you get a soft and slightly sticky dough. Add more egg white if the dough is too dry, or a little more almond flour if it is too wet.
4. Roll the dough into balls, about 1 tablespoon-ful each.
5. Roll into the confectioners' sugar, and place on the prepared baking sheet. Top each cookie with an almond.
6. Bake for 18 to 20 minutes, until lightly golden on the bottom and around the edges. Let cool down and enjoy!

**INGREDIENT TIP:** I recommend using almond flour for these cookies, which is made from ground blanched almonds. You could use almond meal (generally made with whole skin-on almonds) but the result would be a little more crumbly and not as delicate.

# Zeppole alla Ricotta

## Ricotta Fritters

PREP TIME: **15** minutes | COOK TIME: **15** minutes

These Italian fried doughnuts are one of the many ways Italians celebrate Carnevale, in addition to baking *frittelle*, *chiacchiere*, and *castagnole*, just to name a few of the typical desserts. There are a few varieties of zeppole. In this recipe I use ricotta cheese infused with hint of orange flavor. You can serve zeppole with hot chocolate sauce on the side. **MAKES 16 ZEPPOLE, SERVES 4 TO 6**

### 30 MINUTES OR LESS

8 ounces whole-milk ricotta cheese  
2 eggs  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
Zest of 1 orange  
¼ cup granulated sugar  
1 cup all-purpose flour  
1 tablespoon baking powder  
½ teaspoon salt  
Vegetable oil for frying  
2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar, for dusting

1. In a large bowl, combine the ricotta, eggs, and vanilla extract and mix until smooth.
2. Add the finely grated orange zest, granulated sugar, flour, baking powder, and salt. Mix until combined.
3. In a saucepan, pour the oil until it reaches 1 inch in depth. Heat over medium-high flame.
4. When hot, drop the batter in the oil 1 tablespoon at a time. Fry only a few zeppole at a time, for 2 to 3 minutes until dark golden on all sides. Check the inside of the first zeppola to see if it's cooked through. Drain on paper towel, and sprinkle with confectioners' sugar right before serving.
5. Best served when still warm.

# Torta della Nonna

## Grandma's Cake

**PREP TIME:** 20 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 60 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 45 minutes

Nonna knows best! And this heavenly tart, made with two layers of sweet pastry dough, filled with rich and velvety custard cream, and topped with crunchy pine nuts, is just the proof of that! **MAKES ONE 11-INCH TART, SERVES 8 TO 10**

### FOR THE DOUGH (PASTA FROLLA)

3½ cups all-purpose flour

¾ cup sugar

Grated zest of ½ lemon

⅛ teaspoon salt

1½ sticks unsalted butter

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 eggs

1 egg yolk

### FOR THE CUSTARD CREAM (CREMA PASTICCERA):

4 cups milk

Peel of ½ lemon, cut  
in 1 piece

6 egg yolks

½ cup all-purpose flour

1 cup sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### FOR THE CAKE:

2 tablespoons milk

4 ounces pine nuts

1 tablespoon

confectioners' sugar, to  
decorate

### TO MAKE THE DOUGH:

1. In a food processor, put in the flour, sugar, lemon zest, salt, and the butter cut in pieces. Pulse to get a coarse mixture. Add the vanilla extract, 2 eggs, and egg yolk and mix only until the dough comes together. Add 1 or 2 tablespoons of milk if the dough is too dry.
2. Divide the dough in two parts, ⅔ and ⅓. Make into two disks, wrap each in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

### TO MAKE THE CUSTARD CREAM:

1. Warm the milk with the lemon peel until hot, but not boiling.
2. In a large saucepan, add the egg yolks, flour, and sugar. Whisk until light and fluffy.
3. Discard the lemon peel, and add some of the hot milk and whisk until smooth. Incorporate the rest of the milk and vanilla extract while whisking. Place the pan over medium heat and bring to a slow boil, while stirring. The cream will thicken, so make sure it doesn't stick to the bottom. Lower the flame when it starts to bubble and cook for 2 more minutes, until it reaches the desired thickness. Transfer to a bowl and cover with plastic wrap.

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**TO MAKE THE CAKE:**

- 1.** Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease an 11-inch tart pan with removable bottom. Roll out the larger dough into a circle 12 inches in diameter. Helping yourself with the rolling pin, transfer to the tart pan. Trim the excess dough around the edges. Prick the bottom with a fork.
- 2.** Pour the custard in the tart shell and level. Roll out the other pastry into an 11-inch circle. Place on top of the tart, press down around the edges to seal, and trim any extra dough. Gently prick the top with a fork.
- 3.** Brush the top with milk and sprinkle with the pine nuts. Gently press down so that the nuts stick to the dough.
- 4.** Bake in the lower third of the oven for about 45 minutes, until slightly golden on top and around the edges.
- 5.** Let it cool down at room temperature and refrigerate for one hour or longer. Dust with confectioners' sugar before serving.



# *Baci di Dama*

## Chocolate and Hazelnut Sandwich Cookies

**PREP TIME:** 30 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 60 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 15 minutes

*Baci di dama* translates to “lady’s kisses,” just as these two cookies are joined in a chocolate kiss. This recipe is traditionally from Piedmont, and originally made with hazelnuts. It’s also very common to see them made with almonds today. Together with the dark chocolate in the middle, these crumbly and buttery cookies will melt in your mouth and steal your heart. **MAKES ABOUT 25 SMALL COOKIES**

1 cup all-purpose flour  
1 cup blanched hazelnut  
or almond flour  
½ cup sugar  
⅓ teaspoon salt  
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted  
butter, cut into pieces  
and chilled  
1 egg yolk  
2 ounces semisweet  
chocolate, chopped

1. In a large bowl, combine the all-purpose flour, hazelnut or almond flour, sugar, and salt.
2. Add the butter cut in small pieces. With your fingers or a pastry cutter, break down the butter, pinching it between your thumb and first finger while mixing it with the dry ingredients, until you get a coarse mixture.
3. Add the egg yolk and mix with your fingers until all is combined.
4. Move the dough to the counter, make it into a ball, flatten it into a disk, and wrap in plastic. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour.
5. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Remove the dough from the plastic and, working with one piece at a time, roll the dough into a log about the thickness of a thumb. Cut into little pieces about ¼ ounce each. Make about 50 pieces. Roll each gently into small balls (about 1 inch in diameter) and place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.

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6. Bake for 12 to 14 minutes. The top of the cookie will still look pale and soft (they will harden when cooling down) and the bottom will be nice and golden.
  7. While the cookies cool down, melt the chocolate in a double-boiler or microwave. With a small spoon, add a little chocolate to the bottom of a cookie and make a sandwich with another one. Let the cookie cool down for a few minutes in the refrigerator to let the chocolate harden.

**TROUBLESHOOTING TIP:** When you start mixing the dough, it will look really dry. But keep on pinching it with your fingers until it comes together. If it's still too dry, add a little bit of cold water, 1 teaspoon at a time. If, while baking, the cookies turn out too flat, it means the dough has been worked too much and the dough was not cold enough. You can place the rolled cookies in the refrigerator for a half hour before baking. Make sure to store the dough in the refrigerator while you make the cookies if it's taking a long time.

# Migliaccio

## Neapolitan Ricotta Cake

**PREP TIME:** 15 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 15 minutes | **COOK TIME:** 60 minutes

*Migliaccio* is a traditional cake from Napoli that is generally prepared during Carnevale. It's made with whole-milk ricotta cheese and semolina flour. It is flavored with vanilla and lemon. **MAKES ONE 9-INCH CAKE; SERVES ABOUT 8**

### VEGETARIAN

3 cups milk

¼ teaspoon salt

1 cup semolina flour

5 large eggs

1½ cups granulated sugar

10 ounces whole-milk ricotta cheese, drained of any water

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Finely grated zest of 1 lemon

1 tablespoon limoncello or fresh lemon juice

1 tablespoon confectioners' sugar to decorate

1. In a medium pan, bring the milk to a light boil over medium-high heat. Add the salt and semolina flour to the milk, whisking without stopping to avoid lumps from forming.
2. Cook over medium-low heat, mixing continuously and carefully scraping the semolina from the sides and bottom of the pan, for about 5 minutes or until the mixture is thick enough to pull away from the sides of the pan. Remove from the heat, and let it cool down to room temperature.
3. In a separate large bowl, whisk the eggs with the granulated sugar until light and fluffy. You can use a hand-held mixer to make the job easier.
4. Add the ricotta, vanilla extract, lemon zest, and limoncello or lemon juice and whisk well.
5. Add the cooled-down semolina mixture a little at a time to this mixture while beating.

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6. Grease or line a 9-inch round springform pan with parchment paper. Pour the mixture, and tap the pan on the counter a few times to remove air bubbles.
  7. Bake in a preheated oven at 350°F for about 60 minutes or until mostly set in the middle. Turn off the oven and leave the cake in it for 5 more minutes. Remove and let cool down completely. Remove the cake from the pan and dust with confectioners' sugar before serving.

**COOKING TIP:** You can transfer the cooked semolina to a glass bowl to cool down more quickly. If you like, substitute fresh lemon or orange juice for the limoncello. Serve this cake by itself or with your favorite sauce: berry, chocolate, English cream . . . the options are limitless.

**VARIATION TIP:** You can bake this in an 8-inch square pan with a removable bottom, and cut it into 16 squares. I love this size for parties so that I can precut the dessert.

# Roman Maritorzzi alla Panna

PREP TIME: **20** minutes | INACTIVE TIME: **2½** hours | COOK TIME: **30** minutes

*Maritorzzi* can be found in any *pasticceria* in Roma. These soft and fragrant sweet-dough buns, cut in half and filled with rich, fresh whipped cream, are generally served for breakfast next to an espresso or cappuccino. But if you ask me, I'd eat one of these at any time of the day. You can cut them in half and fill them with freshly whipped cream sprinkled with confectioners' sugar. Or enjoy these just as is, sprinkled with sugar. And if you feel like experimenting, add raisins, pine nuts, or candied orange peel to the dough. **SERVES 8; 1 BUN = 1 SERVING**

## VEGETARIAN

½ cup warm milk, plus  
2 tablespoons for  
brushing the top  
2 teaspoons active  
dry yeast  
1 teaspoon honey  
1 cup all-purpose flour  
1 cup bread flour, plus  
¼ cup for the counter  
¼ cup granulated sugar  
Pinch salt  
1 egg  
Finely grated zest of  
1 orange  
¼ cup vegetable oil  
1 cup heavy cream  
2 tablespoons  
confectioners' sugar

1. In a small bowl, combine ½ cup warm milk, yeast, and honey. Mix well and set aside.
2. In a large bowl, combine the all-purpose flour, 1 cup of bread flour, granulated sugar, and salt, and stir together.
3. Make a well in the middle and add the egg, orange zest, and oil. Slowly add the milk mixture, while mixing with your fingers or a fork to incorporate the flour from the inside out. Add 1 or 2 tablespoons of flour if the dough is too sticky.
4. Sprinkle the counter with the remaining ¼ cup bread flour, move the dough, and knead for 5 minutes until the dough comes out smooth and elastic.
5. Make into a ball and place it back in the bowl, sprinkle with flour, cover with plastic wrap and a kitchen towel. Let the dough rise for at least 2 hours.
6. Move to the counter and knead for 1 minute. Divide into 8 equal-size buns (round or oval shaped).



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7. Place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise for another 30 minutes. Brush with milk.
  8. Bake at 350°F for 18 minutes or until golden on top.
  9. Whip the heavy cream with one tablespoon of confectioners' sugar. When the maritozzi are cool, and right before serving, cut them in half and fill with the whipped cream. For a better presentation, pipe the cream or flatten the top with the back of a spoon and sprinkle with confectioners' sugar.

**VARIATION TIP:** If you'd rather not add the whipped cream, I recommend brushing these with water as soon as they are out of the oven and still hot, and sprinkle immediately with granulated sugar. Given the effort you put into this recipe, I strongly recommend doubling up the ingredients because they are that good!

# Cannoncini alla Crema

## Cream-Stuffed Horns

**PREP TIME:** 20 minutes | **INACTIVE TIME:** 1 hour | **COOK TIME:** 25 minutes

Crispy and buttery puff-pastry horns, exploding with rich and sinfully creamy custard. Here is all I love, and need, in a pastry: lick-your-fingers delicious, easy to make with frozen puff pastry, and oh so pretty.

**MAKES 12 HORNS; 6 HORNS = 1 SERVING**

### VEGETARIAN

#### FOR THE CUSTARD CREAM

1 cup milk  
3 egg yolks  
½ cup granulated sugar  
¼ cup all-purpose flour  
½ teaspoon  
vanilla extract

#### FOR THE CANNONCINI

¼ cup granulated sugar  
1 (8-ounce) sheet  
rectangular puff pastry,  
defrosted if frozen  
1 egg  
1 tablespoon water  
1 tablespoon  
confectioners' sugar, for  
decorating

#### TO MAKE THE CUSTARD CREAM:

1. In a small pot, warm up the milk until hot, but not boiling. In a medium-size pan, whisk the egg yolks with the sugar, flour, and vanilla, until light and fluffy. Add the milk a little at a time while whisking, making sure there are no lumps.
2. Place the pan over medium heat and stir continuously until it reaches a slow boil. The cream will thicken, so be careful it doesn't stick to the bottom. Lower the flame and cook for 5 minutes, or until it reaches the desired thickness. Pour the cream in a glass bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let it cool down. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

#### TO MAKE THE CANNONCINI:

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Grease 12 horn-shaped molds. Sprinkle some granulated sugar on the counter and roll out the puff pastry into a rectangle about 9-by-12 inches. Cut into 12 (1-inch-thick) strips. Starting from the tip of a horn-shaped mold, roll the dough around the mold, overlapping by ½ inch. Place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper with seam down. Repeat with the remaining 12 strips.

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2. Beat the egg with water. Brush each pastry cone lightly with the egg wash, being careful that the egg wash doesn't go on the mold, or it will be harder to remove after baking. Bake for 18 minutes, or until a deep golden color on top. Let the horns cool down for 2 minutes and gently remove from the mold.
  3. Before serving, fill the *cannoncini* with cream using a piping bag. Dust with confectioners' sugar and enjoy.

**TROUBLESHOOTING TIP:** If the mold sticks to the horns, press the mold in gently and twist until it comes off.

# Spritz Cocktail

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**PREP TIME:** 2 minutes

If you've been to Venice, or anywhere in Italy, actually, I'm sure you've seen and hopefully tasted a spritz. For this cocktail you can use Aperol, which is most common, or Campari, which is a little stronger and has a higher alcohol content. For the wine part, you can use sparkling Prosecco or a good, non-sparkling, dry white wine. As far as the proportion goes, you are welcome to decide what you like best and how strong you like your cocktails. You could do  $\frac{1}{3}$  Aperol,  $\frac{2}{3}$  wine, and a splash of soda. Or,  $\frac{1}{3}$  Aperol,  $\frac{1}{3}$  wine, and  $\frac{1}{3}$  soda. In all cases I like to add a slice of orange for decoration and flavor. And if you are feeling a little bold, you can add a green olive, too. **SERVES 4**

**12 ice cubes**

**$\frac{2}{3}$  cup Prosecco**

**$\frac{2}{3}$  cup Aperol**

**$\frac{2}{3}$  cup sparkling  
water or soda**

**8 orange slices**

- 1.** Add 2 or 3 ice cubes to each glass. Don't add too many or the drink will be a little too watered down when it melts.
- 2.** Fill each glass one-third full with the Prosecco.
- 3.** Add the Aperol, and top with the sparkling water.
- 4.** Decorate with 1 or 2 orange slices.

# Bellini Cocktail

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**PREP TIME:** 10 minutes

Created by Cipriani and named after the famous Venetian artist Jacopo Bellini, this cocktail is sure to add some fun and sparkle to your summer. This recipe is ready in a snap. All you need are some ripe and flavorful white peaches and some, not necessarily expensive, Italian Prosecco. For each part of puréed peach, you need two parts Prosecco. **SERVES 4**

**2 large or 3 medium white peaches, ripe, refrigerated, plus more for serving**  
**2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice**  
**1 teaspoon sugar (optional)**  
**2 cups Prosecco, refrigerated**

- 1.** Peel the peaches, remove the pits, cut in pieces, and use a blender to blend with the lemon juice and sugar, if using. Strain.
- 2.** Divide the pureed peach among 4 chilled champagne glasses. It should fill about one-third of each glass. Slowly top with  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cold Prosecco, per cup. Stir once right before serving.
- 3.** Decorate each glass with a peach slice, peel on, if you'd like.



# Mimosa Cocktail

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**PREP TIME:** 2 minutes

Your typical brunch cocktail can't get any simpler and more refreshing. Use freshly squeezed orange juice or a good-quality store-bought pulp-free juice. Mix 1 part orange juice with 1 part dry sparkling wine. There's no need to spend a fortune on the wine, so a mid-to-low-range Prosecco or champagne are just fine. **SERVES 4**

1 cup fresh orange  
juice, cold

1 cup dry sparkling  
wine, cold

4 orange slices,  
for garnish

1. Divide the orange juice among 4 flute glasses.
2. Top with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup chilled sparkling wine each.
3. Garnish with an orange slice and enjoy!

**SERVING TIP:** Because there's sparkling wine in this cocktail, the best glasses to serve it in are champagne flutes, with their narrow opening, to help keep the bubbles in. Make sure to chill the glasses in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes, especially if no ice is in the cocktail.

# Sgroppino Cocktail

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**PREP TIME:** 5 minutes

This refreshing, lemony, and boozy drink originates in Venezia. The name *sgroppino* in Venetian dialect means a little something that “unties.” It’s a palate cleanser, an alcoholic drink-slash-dessert served after dinner on a hot summer night . . . or any night, if you ask me. **SERVES 4**

**1½ cups lemon sorbet**  
**2 ounces vodka, chilled**  
**⅔ cup Prosecco, chilled**

- 1.** Chill 4 champagne flutes in the refrigerator for 1 hour or longer.
- 2.** In a blender, combine the lemon sorbet, vodka, and Prosecco. Quickly blend until incorporated and smooth.
- 3.** Divide among the four flutes and serve immediately.

**VARIATION TIP:** Substitute more vodka for some of the Prosecco for a stronger drink. Or the other way around, as long as you keep the proportions the same to get a dense and soft, slushy kind of texture. You can also use an immersion blender.







# Italian Courses

*“A tavola non s’invecchia”*

**T**ime stands still when you are gathered around a table with people you love—relaxing, chatting, laughing, and enjoying the pleasure of great company, delicious food, and wine. Just like this old Italian expression tells us: “At the table, one doesn’t grow old.”

When you put a lot of time and care into meal preparation, you should always put at least as much time and care into savoring it. That’s just what Italians like to do. If you were to travel to Italy and immerse yourself in the local food culture, you’d see that the average meal in Italy lasts longer than an hour, and it generally consists of three to five courses, or a lot more if we are talking about special occasions and fancy holiday dinners. A meal starts with an aperitivo and antipasto, followed by a primo piatto of pasta, rice, or soup, a secondo piatto, or entrée of meat or fish, served with a *contorno*, side dish of vegetables, and freshly baked bread. This is followed by an optional, but highly recommended, dessert, fruit and/or digestive, like amaretto or limoncello, meant to cleanse your palate and help digest the incredible amount of goodness that just entered your stomach.

When planning a menu, especially for a special occasion, one needs to create a balance between ingredients, flavors, textures, and cooking methods, as well as a flow from the first to the last bite. You are looking for dishes that go well together, even if they are not eaten at the same time, and dishes that don't have main ingredients in common, or it would be too much of the same. Last but not least, keep in mind the taste and preferences of the people you are cooking for. After all, nothing makes the dinner creator happier than their oohs and aahs, and all the mmms of delight!

Here are some sample menus for you.

## *Seafood Lover's Dinner*

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This five-course, fancy dinner offers a great variety of seafood choices. It's a sure way to impress your guests, but shhh . . . no need to tell anyone that each of these dishes can be made in less than 30 minutes. It'll be our secret!

**Antipasto:** Polenta e Gamberetti (page 14)

**Primo:** Spaghetti alle Vongole (page 66)

**Secondo:** Pesce Spada alla Siciliana (page 122)

**Contorno:** Insalata di Finocchi e Arance (page 34)

**Dolce:** Sgroppino (page 164)

**TIP:** For the secondo piatto you can also make the Filetti di Branzino alla Genovese (page 124) or the Filetti di Dentice al Cartoccio (page 123). Don't forget to pair this meal with a crisp, dry white wine, like a verdicchio, a Soave, or the beloved pinot grigio.



## *Spaghetтата with Friends*

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Welcome your friends to your kitchen with a spritz, then make this quick and easy dinner together.

**Aperitivo:** Spritz (page 162)

**Antipasto:** Traditional Bruschetta with Fresh Tomatoes (page 16)

**Primo:** Spaghetti alla Carbonara (page 62)

**TIP:** To finish off with something sweet, offer a scoop of gelato with fresh fruit. Or you can make a Panna Cotta with Berry Sauce (page 148) the night before, and surprise your friends with this amazing, but easy-to-make dessert. Pair this carbonara pasta with a typical Roman bottle of chilled Frascati white wine or the classic pinot grigio.

## *Hearty Make-Ahead Supper*

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This cozy and stress-free menu is perfect for those times when you want to have everything ready ahead of time. All you need to do is warm up the primo and secondo before your guests arrive.

**Primo:** Traditional Lasagna (page 70)

**Secondo:** Brasato al Barolo (page 104)

**Dolce:** Tiramisù (page 146)

**TIP:** Add some roasted potatoes or a green salad and a few slices of freshly baked bread to offer with the brasato. Serve next to a robust red wine, such as a Chianti, Valpolicella, Amarone, or Barolo, of course.

## Traditional Roman Dinner

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Let's enjoy dinner just like they do in Rome! There are lots of choices for pasta recipes typical of this region, so you can swap the Pasta all'Amatriciana with a Cacio e Pepe (page 64) or Spaghetti alla Carbonara (page 62).

**Antipasto:** Carciofi alla Giudea (page 12)

**Primo:** Pasta all'Amatriciana (page 63)

**Secondo:** Saltimbocca alla Romana (page 96)

**Contorno:** Patate Arroste (page 141)

**Dolce:** Roman Maritozzi alla Panna (page 158)

**TIP:** This pasta and saltimbocca go well with a light- or medium-bodied, fruity red wine, like a canaiolo nero from the Lazio region. A lambrusco, nero d'avola, or primitivo also work great.

## Vegetarian Feast

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If you are looking for a filling and satisfying, rich and comforting three-course menu with all vegetarian options, look no further.

**Antipasto:** Arancini (page 8)

**Salad:** Panzanella (page 35)

**Primo:** Potato Gnocchi (page 74)

**Secondo:** Parmigiana di Melanzane (page 130)

**TIP:** Wines to pair with the eggplant parmigiana are medium-bodied, earthy reds like a Valpolicella or barbera.



# Glossary

**Antipasto:** Italian for “before a meal.” Like an appetizer, the antipasto is served after the aperitivo and before the primo piatto.

**Aperitivo:** Like an aperitif, it consists of a beverage served before the antipasto, generally Prosecco or a cocktail like a spritz. The term, in Italy, also refers to the very common pre-dinner social occasion of meeting with friends to relax, chat, and have a drink while nibbling on some snacks.

**Appetito:** Italian for “appetite.” Before starting a meal, Italians wish the others to enjoy their meal by saying “buon appetito.”

**Besciamella:** White sauce made with flour, butter, and milk used in baked pasta and other dishes.

**Brasato:** Italian for “braised,” brasato is a cooking technique that requires browning the meat and then slowly cooking it in liquid like wine.

**Bucatini:** Pasta in the shape of thick spaghetti, with a hole running through the center. *Buco* is Italian for “hole.”

**Buonissimo:** Very good.

**Contorno:** A side dish consisting of vegetables or salads, served at the same time as the secondo piatto.

**Dolce:** Dessert. *Dolce* is Italian for “sweet.”

**Lasagna:** Flat and wide pasta used in the baked dish of the same name, made with layers of pasta and sauce (meat and/or white sauce), or vegetables and other ingredients.

**Linguine:** Pasta in the form of flat spaghetti.

**Mantecare:** To work on a dish or ingredient to make it creamier, like a risotto, before serving it.

**Pappardelle:** Flat pasta cut larger than tagliatelle, about ½ inch wide.

**Pasta al Forno:** Baked pasta. *Forno* is Italian for “oven.”

**Penne:** Cylinder-shaped pasta with angled edges that comes in different varieties: *penne rigate*, which are penne with ridges; *pennette*, which are penne thinner in size; and *mezze penne*, which are penne cut in half.

**Peperoncino:** Extra-hot dry, small red peppers.

**Primo Piatto:** First course of soup, risotto, or a pasta dish.

**Prosciutto:** Italian dry-cured meat. In Italian it's called *prosciutto crudo* to differentiate it from *prosciutto cotto*, which is cooked ham. Prosciutto di Parma and San Daniele are two of the most famous varieties.

**Radicchio:** Leafy vegetable, red and white in color, with a slightly bitter and spicy flavor.

**Ragù:** Sauce made with ground meat and tomato sauce.

**Risotto:** Creamy rice dish made by simmering the rice with broth.

**Scarpetta or “Fare la Scarpetta”:** Italian for “making a little shoe,” which means soaking up the sauce left on the plate using a piece of bread.

**Secondo Piatto:** Second course, which generally includes a meat or a sea-food dish.

**Soffritto:** Making a *soffritto* is the first step of many recipes. To make a soffritto, sauté a finely diced onion, carrot, and celery in olive oil and/or butter.

**Tagliatelle:** Flat pasta cut larger than linguine, but narrower than pap-pardelle.



# Measurement Conversions

## Volume Equivalents (Liquid)

US STANDARD	US STANDARD (OUNCES)	METRIC (APPROXIMATE)
2 tablespoons	1 fl. oz.	30 mL
$\frac{1}{4}$ cup	2 fl. oz.	60 mL
$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	4 fl. oz.	120 mL
1 cup	8 fl. oz.	240 mL
$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups	12 fl. oz.	355 mL
2 cups or 1 pint	16 fl. oz.	475 mL
4 cups or 1 quart	32 fl. oz.	1 L
1 gallon	128 fl. oz.	4 L

## Oven Temperatures

FAHRENHEIT (F)	CELSIUS (C) (APPROXIMATE)
250°F	120°C
300°F	150°C
325°F	165°C
350°F	180°C
375°F	190°C
400°F	200°C
425°F	220°C
450°F	230°C

## Volume Equivalents (Dry)

US STANDARD	METRIC (APPROXIMATE)
$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon	0.5 mL
$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon	1 mL
$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon	2 mL
$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon	4 mL
1 teaspoon	5 mL
1 tablespoon	15 mL
$\frac{1}{4}$ cup	59 mL
$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	79 mL
$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	118 mL
$\frac{2}{3}$ cup	156 mL
$\frac{3}{4}$ cup	177 mL
1 cup	235 mL
2 cups or 1 pint	475 mL
3 cups	700 mL
4 cups or 1 quart	1 L

## Weight Equivalents

US STANDARD	METRIC (APPROXIMATE)
$\frac{1}{2}$ ounce	15 g
1 ounce	30 g
2 ounces	60 g
4 ounces	115 g
8 ounces	225 g
12 ounces	340 g
16 ounces or 1 pound	455 g

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# *Acknowledgments*

A huge thank you to the Callisto Publishing team for giving me this incredible opportunity, and creating such a wonderful book. In particular, a big thank-you to my talented and lovely editor, Myryah, for her always-positive feedback and kind help along the way.

Thank you to my family and friends, readers, and followers for the continued support. I wouldn't have a blog or this book without you.

And thank you to my husband, Maurizio, and sons, Mathias and Alex, for the constant support and encouragement, for happily listening to me continuously chat about food, and for enthusiastically taste-testing all my creations.

# About the Author



**MANUELA ANELLI MAZZOCCO** is a full-time blogger, recipe developer, photographer, and influencer. She is the creator and voice behind the blog *Cooking with Manuela*, where she shares her passion for food and photography, and inspires others to try new dishes with her easy-to-follow, step-by-step instructions and video recipes. Originally from Venezia, Italy, where she grew up, Manuela now lives in Los Angeles, California, with her husband and two sons. Find her online at [cookingwithmanuela.blogspot.com](http://cookingwithmanuela.blogspot.com).





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