

Our culinary traditions

In this book are typical Sicilian recipes divided into: Starters, Main Courses and Desserts.

Arancini:

Arancini, the pride of the Sicilian kitchen, are fried rice balls filled with Bolognese sauce and peas. They can also be filled with vegetables such as mushrooms or aubergines.

For the meat sauce:

400 g of minced beef meat
1 onion
100 g tomato paste
50 g grated Parmesan cheese
2 bay leaves
2 cloves
200 g fresh peas (frozen peas are fine too)
Extra virgin olive oil
½ glass of white wine
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Prepare the rice about twelve hours before making meat rice balls (it must be cold, because in order to obtain excellent meat rice balls the dough has to be quite hard and sticky) .
Prepare the broth in which we will melt the saffron.
Sauté the finely chopped onion in a large saucepan (without browning it), add the rice and toast it, then, while constantly stirring, add the hot broth little by little and cook the rice. Take it off the flame and add the grated Parmesan cheese and butter. Cook for a few minutes until creamy, then pour into a large plate and let cool.

Let's prepare the meat sauce

Gently fry the onion with olive oil in a pan. Add the minced meat and sauté over a high heat, being careful to break it up well with a wooden spoon, then simmer with white wine until reduced. Add salt, pepper, bay leaves, cloves and the tomato paste dissolved in a little water (the meat sauce must be thick in the end, almost dry) and, when cooking is complete, add the Parmesan cheese.
Cook the peas (if you use frozen ones defrost them in salted hot water with 1 bay leaf and a pinch of sugar), drain them and add them to the cold meat sauce.

Let's make the rice balls

Take a spoonful of rice and put it on the palm of your hand so as to form a hollow where we will put a spoonful of meat sauce and, in the center, a cube of cheese. Take another spoonful of rice and cover the meat sauce very well, being careful not to let it come out. Shape the meat balls squeezing this mix with your hands in order to compact it. Roll them into the breadcrumbs, keeping the balls compact and set aside. Proceed until you run out of the ingredients.

Fry the meat balls in abundant hot oil until they are golden brown (the best results are obtained with a deep fat fryer)



CAPONATA:

Ingredients:

10 eggplants
Oil for frying

1 big celery and 1 onion
 300 g green olives
 3 tablespoons of pickled or salted capers
 1.5 lt fresh tomato sauce
 Salt and pepper to taste
 1 glass of vinegar
 2 tablespoons of sugar

Directions:

Wash the eggplants, remove the stems together with the ends of the eggplant, cut just a strip of peel, by practicing a vertical cut that goes from end to end. Now, cut the eggplant into rather big cubes and fry them in hot oil. Put them to drain on blotting paper.

Clean the celery removing all the green leaves, cut it into pieces and boil it in salted water. Fry the sliced onion in a large pan. As soon as it is golden brown add the boiled celery, the pitted and chopped olives, the pickled capers (if we use salted capers we have to wash away the salt) and the tomato sauce. Season with salt and pepper and cook. When almost cooked, add fried eggplants to the sauce, let it cook for few minutes. Meanwhile, melt the sugar in the vinegar and pour it on the sauce with the eggplants. Let the vinegar simmer well. It is a dish that is best appreciated when eaten cold.



Parmigiana :

4 aubergines

flour for dusting eggplant

seed oil for frying

500 ml (2 1/8 cups) of tomato purée

extra virgin olive oil

1 clove of garlic

a few basil leaves

150 g (5 1/4 oz) mozzarella, sliced

3 eggs, beaten

100 g (1 cups) of grated Parmesan cheese

Istructions

1. Wash the aubergines and cut them into 5 mm thick slices.
2. Arrange the aubergine slices in a colander with a good sprinkle of coarse salt in between the layers, put a plate on top of the aubergines then place a weight over the plate. Leave the aubergines on the sink for about 30 minutes, they will be less bitter.
3. After this time, rinse the slices under running water and arrange them on a towel. Pat them dry.
4. Scoop some flour into a bowl and coat the aubergine slices, shaking off the excess flour from each slice.
5. Meanwhile heat the frying oil in a large pan: the best ones are those shaped like a wok: you will use less frying oil.
6. Check if the oil is hot enough sacrificing a slice of aubergine: dip a corner in the oil and when it is surrounded by many small small bubbles it means that the oil is hot enough.
7. Deep fry the aubergines in batches. Let them brown on both sides, it takes about 5 minutes. When the aubergines are golden and crisp, place them in a dish with some layer of kitchen paper, so that the excess oil is absorbed. Season lightly the aubergines with salt (*lightly! they have already been in salted water for 30 minutes! believe me when I say it's better to taste them to see how much salt they need, it is not much of a sacrifice*). Deep fry all the aubergines.
8. Make the tomato sauce. Heat a few tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil in a pan with a clove of garlic. When the garlic turns golden pour the tomato purée, add a cup of water and some fresh basil leaves. Season with a pinch of salt. Cook the tomato purée for about ten minutes, until it has lost the taste of raw tomatoes and has become a savory and thick sauce.
9. Finally, the time has come to make 'melanzane alla parmigiana'. Choose your favourite baking dish (about 30 x 20 cm) and spread a few tablespoons of tomato sauce on the bottom.
10. Arrange a layer of fried aubergines, pour over a part of the beaten eggs, sprinkle with some mozzarella and a generous layer of grated Parmigiano. Spread the tomato sauce on top and keep making layers, until you run out of ingredients. If you have not eaten too many fried aubergine slices - you have my sympathy - you should be able to make four layers. Top with tomato sauce, a few pieces of mozzarella and a lot of Parmigiano.
11. Bake in the preheated oven to 180°C (356°F) for about 35 minutes, until golden brown on the top.
12. Serve the parmigiana warm or, even better, let it cool down completely and warm it again in the evening or the next day, it will be even more tasty.



Pasta dishes:

Pasta with Sardines:

Ingredients:

200g Bucatini

200g Sardines

200g fennel

1 teaspoon of saffron

20g raisins

20g pine nuts

Extra Virgin olive oil

Sea Salt

Black pepper

½ Onion.



Istructions:

Run your thumb gently along the backbone to release it, and you should be able to pull it out easily. If using anchovies in oil, drain them.

Toast the breadcrumbs in a dry pan over a medium heat, until they are quite a dark golden brown.

Take care not to burn them.

Heat half the extra-virgin olive oil in a pan and add the onion. Sauté until softened but not coloured, then add the anchovies, stirring until they 'melt'. Add the wine and bubble up to let it evaporate, then add the 'strattu or purée and bring back to the boil, adding just enough water to give a sauce consistency. Add the sardine fillets, sultanas, pine nuts, saffron and chopped fennel or soaked seeds. Taste and season with salt and black pepper if necessary, stir and cook for 10 minutes.

Bring a pan of water to the boil, add salt, then put in the pasta and cook for about a minute less than the time given on the packet, so that it is al dente. Drain, reserving some cooking water. Toss the pasta with the sardine sauce, adding a little of the pasta cooking water if necessary to loosen the sauce, and sprinkle with the toasted breadcrumbs.

Pasta alla norma:

Ingredients:

500 g of macaroni (but that's okay any kind of pasta)
1 kg ripe tomatoes for tomato sauce
4 local aubergines (see caponata)
A bunch of basil
2 cloves of garlic
Oil for frying
Salt and pepper to taste
Salted Ricotta



Instructions:

Gently fry the whole garlic and add the cleaned tomatoes cut into pieces and a few leaves of basil. Season with salt and pepper and cook over low heat. When the tomato is withered, remove from heat, pass it through a sieve and set aside the so obtained sauce.
Wash the aubergines, remove the stems together with a piece of the aubergine, cut just a strip of skin practicing a vertical cut from end to end (the skin must remain, but this strip). Now you have to choose wether to cut the eggplant into slices or cubes, I prefer them in cubes the result does not change. Then fry them in plentiful oil and place them on food oil absorbing paper towels. Cook the pasta al dente, mix it with the tomato sauce and serve laying down on it the fried eggplant, some basil leaves and a final sprinkling of freshly grated salted ricotta.

Pasta al nero di seppia:

Ingredients:

500g (1 lb) spaghetti or other long pasta

500-750g (1 lb) small (baby) squid, cut into small pieces

2-3 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped

1-2 *peperoncini*, or a pinch of red pepper flakes

A few sprigs of fresh parsley, finely minced

A splash of white wine

4-6 sachets of squid ink (4g each), to taste



Instructions:

In a large pan, gently sauté the chopped garlic, parsley and *peperoncini* or red pepper flakes in olive oil until the garlic is just beginning to turn brown. (Remove the *peperoncini* if using.) Add the cut up squid, give it a good stir to cover it with the seasoned oil. Let the squid sweat in the oil, uncovered, for a few minutes. Add a splash of white wine and cover, letting the squid simmer very gently for another 15 minutes or so, or until tender. When the squid is done, add the squid ink (along with drizzle of water if needed to keep things saucy) and continue simmering until the resulting sauce is thick and very black. Shortly before the sauce is done cooking, boil the spaghetti in well salted water until *al dente*. Add the cooked pasta, drained but not too well, to the pan and mix well so the pasta is well coated with the jet black sauce. Serve immediately.

Main Courses:

Sardines Beccafico:

Ingredients:

a dozen medium-size fresh sardines
1 glass of wine vinegar (I used white vinegar)
100 g of breadcrumbs
50 g of grated pecorino
50 gr. raisins
50 gr. pine nuts
2 or 3 eggs
chopped parsley
00 flour as needed
Black pepper and garlic granules



Instructions:

Prepare a mix with breadcrumbs, garlic and pepper, parsley, one or two eggs, raisins, pine nuts, a pinch of salt and a tablespoon of vinegar. Meanwhile, the sardines, boned and split in two, will have half an hour soaking in vinegar. Pass first in flour, then beaten egg and finally in bread crumbs and fry in hot oil on both sides.

Meatloaf:

Ingredients:

- 1-1/2 pounds Ground Beef (93% lean or leaner)
- 3/4 cup Panko bread crumbs
- 3/4 cup ketchup
- 1/2 cup minced onion
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme leaves
- 3/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- Heat oven to 350°F. Combine ground beef, bread crumbs, 1/2 cup ketchup, onion, egg, Worcestershire, garlic, thyme, pepper and salt in large bowl, mixing lightly but thoroughly. Shape beef into 8 x 4-inch loaf on rack in aluminum foil-lined broiler pan.
- Place upper oven rack in 350°F oven. Bake 45 to 55 minutes, until instant-read thermometer inserted into center registers 160°F; brush with remaining 1/4 cup ketchup during last 10 minutes, if desired. Let stand 10 minutes. Cut into slices.

Desserts:

Cannoli:

150g plain flour

1 tsp golden caster sugarlarge pinch bicarbonate of soda

½ tsp cinnamon

1 tsp cocoa powder (optional)

30g butter

1 egg

, separated

50ml dry marsala or white wine

rapeseed oil

or sunflower oil for deep-frying (see tip)

- 50g dark chocolate, melted
- handful pistachio kernels, finely chopped
- icing sugar, to dust

For the filling

- 250g ricotta

drained and beaten until fluffy

100g mascarpone

2 tbsp finely chopped candied peel

2 tbsp icing sugar

Instructions:

1. Tip the flour, sugar, bicarb, cinnamon and cocoa (if using) into a bowl with a pinch of salt. Add the butter and rub it into the dry ingredients until there are no more lumps. Mix the egg yolk and marsala and add this to the bowl, then mix the whole lot together and knead to a smooth dough. Wrap and rest in the fridge. (Can be made ahead and fried the next day.)
2. Fill a deep-fat fryer, wok or deep saucepan a third of the way up with oil. Cut the dough into pieces and, working one piece at a time, roll them out as thinly as you can – use a pasta machine if you have one. Heat the oil and keep an eye on it until it reaches 180C. Lay the dough out on a lightly floured surface and cut out circles about 11cm across. Wrap each one around a cannoli mould, using some of the egg white to stick the top edge down and they're ready for frying.

It's important to take care when cooking with hot oil. Read our guide on [how to deep-fry safely](#) to avoid accidents in the kitchen.

3. Deep-fry the cannoli (with their moulds) one at a time, making sure they cook all over. They should take about 45-60 seconds in all and should be visibly golden brown (keep cooking a little longer if they aren't) and the dough will bubble and blister. Carefully take each one out of the oil using the tongs and shake the cannoli off the mould very carefully onto kitchen paper. As you fry each one, *make sure the oil stays at 180C at all times and doesn't get any hotter*. These will keep for 2-3 days in an airtight container.
4. When the cannoli are cold, dip the end of each one into chocolate, then dip some of those into the pistachios. Leave to cool and harden. Beat the ricotta and mascarpone together, then stir in the candied peel and sugar. Spoon the mixture into a piping bag with a wide star nozzle and pipe it into the cannoli. Serve soon after filling



Appetizers:

Pizza:

DOUGH

* ---

* 1 package active dry yeast (about 2 teaspoons)

* 1 cup warm water

* 1 teaspoon sugar

* 2 tablespoons olive oil

* 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

* pinch salt

* Topping:

* 1 can (8 ounces) tomato sauce

* browned ground beef or Italian sausage, broken up

* 1 can sliced mushrooms, drained

* thinly sliced green pepper and onions, optional

* 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese

* 1 to 2 cups shredded Mozzarella cheese

Preparation:

Add yeast to the water and stir until dissolved. Add sugar, oil, flour, and salt. Set mixing bowl filled with dough in warm water for 5 minutes to rise. Pat dough out on a well-greased pizza pan or cookie sheet.

Layer toppings on dough in order listed. Bake at 400° for 15 to 20 minutes

The History of Pizza Margherita

Pizza Margherita is to many the true Italian flag.

According to popular tradition, in 1889, 28 years after the unification of Italy, during a visit to Naples of Queen Margherita of Savoy, wife of King Umberto I, chef Raffaele Esposito of Pizzeria Brandi and his wife created a pizza resembling the colors of the Italian flag, red (tomato), white (mozzarella) and green (basil). They named it after the Queen - Pizza Margherita.

Descriptions of such a pizza recipe, however, can be traced back to at least 1866 in Francesco DeBouchard's book "Customs and Traditions of Naples". There he describes the most popular pizza toppings of the time which included one with tomato and basil, often topped with slices of mozzarella.

Whatever the real origins of this pizza recipe are, all we know for sure is that Raffaele Esposito's version for Queen Margherita was the one that made it popular. Since then, it has grown into one of the most recognisable symbol of Italian food culture in the world.

Since 2009, Pizza Margherita is one of the three Pizze Napoletane with an STG (Specialità Tradizionali Garantite - Traditional Guaranteed Specialty) EU label together with the Marinara (garlic and oregano) and the Margherita Extra (mozzarella di Bufala Campana DOP, fresh basil and tomatoes).

The top quality of the ingredients and the traditional preparation and cooking method are at the basis of a true Pizza Napoletana STG.

You need to have a 3 mm thick disk of dough with a 1-2 cm high crust. No other working tools other than the hands of the pizza chef are allowed, no rolling pin or mechanical press machine, and it needs to be cooked in a wood- brick oven at 485°C for about 90 seconds.

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