DISCOVER ITALIAN FOOD, DRINK AND LIVING WITH LIDIA BASTIANICH, ONE OF AMERICA BEST-LOVED CHEFS - PRICE $5.99 US, $6.99 CANADA - ISSUE #5 2021

Lidia's Italy at Home

Lidia's Celebration Menu

For showers, graduations, and more

Clambake, Italian-Style

A New England classic gets festive

Garden-Fresh Pastas

Summery salads and family favorites

Discovering Puglia

Dazzling beaches, seafood, and wines

Grab a Bite

Homemade Italian street food

Get Grilling

Tuscan-style steaks and Sicilian rollatini



Chef Lidia Bastianich brings us into her home to share her favorite family recipes:
Chilled Yellow Tomato and Corn Soup • Spicy Potato Salad • Rigatoni alla Norma
Peach-Basil Sgroppino • Grilled Pork Chops with Plum and Red Onion Mostarda • Quick Tiramisù

LIDIA'S ITALY AT HOME.indd 1 02/07/21 18:33



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Tutti a tavola!


Photo © Diana DeLucia

Summer has never been more welcomed as it is this year, as we emerge from such a difficult year for the whole world, and as we begin, slowly, to once more gather around the table with friends and family we have had to be apart from.

Like so many of you, our family has also experienced loss this year. My beautiful mother, Erminia Matticchio, who was 100 years young, passed away in February. "Grandma," as she was affectionately known, was not only deeply loved by our family but also by everyone who watched our shows. She was always there to tell a story or give me a tip in the kitchen, as we cooked and laughed together. She will be missed more than words can say, and I thank all of you who reached out to tell us how much she also meant to you.

We always highlight some of Grandma's favorite recipes in each issue and share memories with you about her. In this issue, I share one of her favorite desserts, a fruit "lasagna" (page 118), made with peaches and plums. My garden is also a place where Grandma and I spent many special times together, growing and picking vegetables that we would then prepare for our family's meals. She had a special gift for growing tomatoes. So in making a raw tomato sauce (page 92) and the bread-and-tomato salad called panzanella (page 10), I have Grandma very much in my heart.

Cooking and sharing a meal is, for me, one of the best ways to celebrate how much our families mean to us. So also in this issue we have ideas for a festive clambake and food to celebrate a wedding or baby shower or a graduation party. We highlight the best produce of the season, great foods for grilling, and, of course, the many wonderful ways of pasta.

From my family to yours, happy summer!



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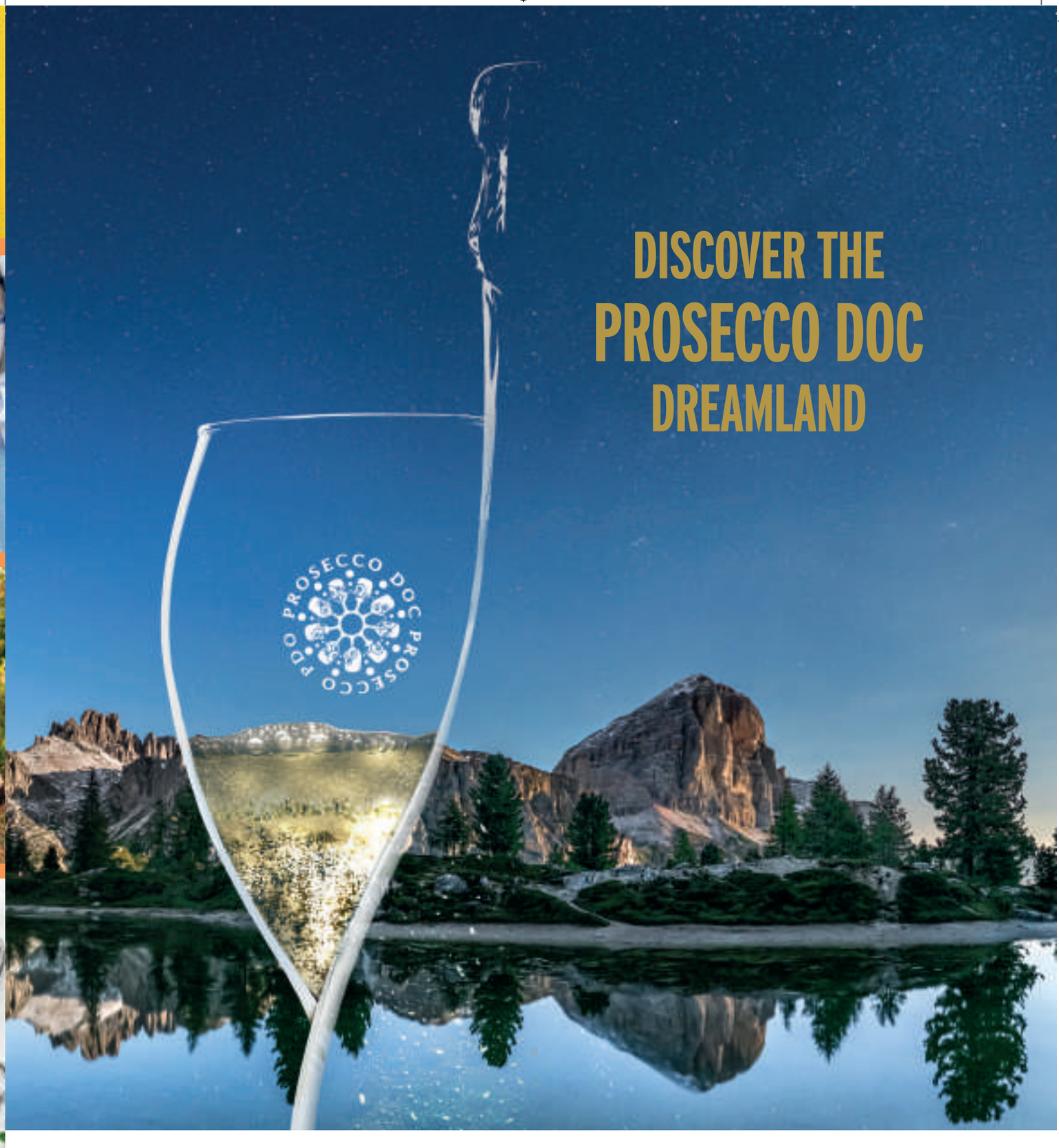

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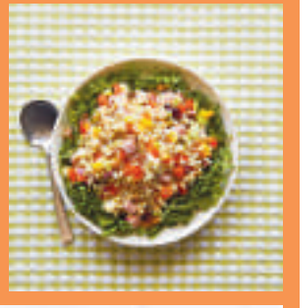


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MORE THAN ITALIAN

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LAVAZZA

TORINO, ITALIA, 1895

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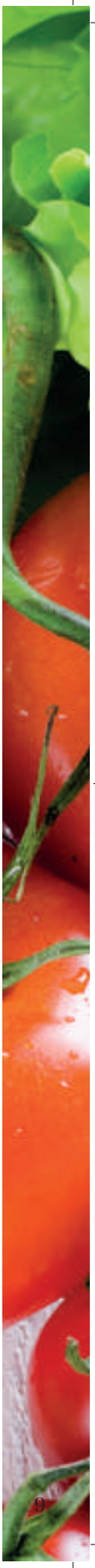
IN MY GARDEN: TOMATOES & ZUCCHINI

If there is one food that says "Italy" it's the tomato. And if there is one fruit (yes, it's a fruit, not a vegetable) that says "summer," the tomato is it. I can't imagine my garden without the Roma and San Marzano plum tomatoes I grow to make sauces, the large tomatoes in traditional and heirloom varieties for slicing and salads, and the cherry tomatoes that Grandma and I began to grow when my grandchildren were small. Those tiny tomatoes were just the right size for the kids' little hands to pick themselves and pop into their mouths. The children are grown now, but they still love joining us in the garden to help with the weeding, watering, and harvesting, just as I did as a child with my own grandmother, and to snack on those sun-sweetened tomatoes straight from the vine.

Grandma liked to pick the tomatoes just before they were at peak ripeness (and before the squirrels could get to them). She let them ripen to perfection lined up along our kitchen windowsills, which also makes a beautiful summery display. (She picked out some of the best of the bunch and let them desiccate to preserve them as sun-dried tomatoes and saved the seeds for planting the following spring.)

One of my favorite dishes to make with the tomatoes when they're fragrant and ready to eat, is panzanella, the Tuscan bread-and-tomato salad. With the addition of red onion and basil, and tossed with olive oil and vinegar, panzanella is one of the simplest no-cook meals for warm summer days, and a great way to use up day-old bread. To make the salad a meal, I often include a protein like fresh mozzarella.

Zucchini is also in such abundance in my garden that we can pick some of them in the baby stage when they have blossoms attached, and still have plenty to eat when they're fully grown. As we used to do back in Busoler, we pluck the blossoms just before we start cooking, and add them to a risotto. Fritters are another great way to bring zucchini to your summer table, especially when corn fresh from the field is added to the mix. Dipped in marinara sauce you make from homegrown or market tomatoes, these fritters bring your garden right to your plate.



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Panzanella

Adding some sturdy greens and cubed fresh mozzarella make this summer salad into a meal. Don't let the juices from those perfect summer tomatoes go to waste—use them to dress the salad and add extra tomato flavor.

Yield

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

2 pounds ripe tomatoes (a variety is nice)
8 cups day-or two-day-old country bread cubes, tough crusts removed
½ medium red onion, sliced
5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 head frisée, torn into bite-sized pieces
8 ounces fresh mozzarella, cubed
⅓ cup fresh basil leaves, shredded

Recipe

Set a strainer over a bowl. Core and seed the tomatoes over the bowl to catch the juices. Cut the tomatoes into wedges and/or chunks. Reserve the juices in the bottom of the bowl.

Toss the bread, tomatoes, and red onion in a large serving bowl. Drizzle the olive oil, vinegar, and tomato juices over the salad and season with salt and pepper. Toss well. Let stand 10 minutes.

After 10 minutes, if the bread still seems dry, drizzle with a few tablespoons of water and toss again. Add the frisée, mozzarella, and basil and toss again. Serve.



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Zucchini and Corn Fritters

FRITTELLE DI ZUCCHINE E MAIS

These versatile fritters make a great summer appetizer or a side dish to roast or grilled chicken or pork. While these are best with fresh corn, you could use thawed frozen corn kernels in a pinch. If you don't have marinara on hand (though you should!), you could serve these with a garlic mayonnaise.

Yield

Serves 4 to 6 (12 to 15 fritters)

Ingredients

Vegetable oil, for frying
1 medium zucchini, grated on the coarse holes of a box grater
1 cup all-purpose flour
¾ teaspoon baking powder
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 large egg
¾ cup milk
1 ear corn, kernels removed (about ½ cup)
¼ cup grated Grana Padano
2 scallions, finely chopped
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
Warm marinara sauce, for dipping

Recipe

Heat an inch of vegetable oil in a large skillet to 365 degrees F. Wrap the zucchini in a clean kitchen towel and wring out the excess liquid.

Sift the flour and baking powder into a large bowl. Add 1 teaspoon salt and a generous grinding of black pepper. Whisk in the egg and milk to make a smooth batter (but don't overmix). Break up the zucchini if it's in clumps and add to the bowl. Add the corn, Grana Padano, scallions, and parsley. Stir just to combine.

Use a soup spoon to add the batter to the oil, without crowding. Fry, turning once, until golden brown and cooked through, about 4 minutes total. Remove fritters with a spider or slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Repeat with any remaining batter. Season the fritters with salt and serve with the warm marinara for dipping.



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Flavors of Childhood

I often talk about inviting my children and grandchildren into the garden to tend and harvest herbs and vegetables and then learn to cook with them, just as I once did with my own grandmother, Nonna Rosa. I return to this again and again because those early experiences shaped the way I thought about food and made deep connections with ingredients from the ground up. My mother and I have always invited the grandkids to smell the fragrant herbs, like basil and thyme, to pinch off a leaf and rub it between their fingers to release the fragrance, and then to nibble it to experience the flavor when it is just picked. If you love to cook and want to share that love with your children, I encourage you to invite them into a garden, whether it's your own, a friend's, or a community plot, to get up close with produce where it's grown.

A wonderful dish that my grandkids have enjoyed taking from plant to finished dish is a classic Genovese-style basil pesto. (Genoa, the capital of the northern coastal region of Liguria, is celebrated for its light, herb-intense dishes.) From plucking the basil leaves, with their heavenly aroma, taking them to the kitchen, adding the few ingredients (olive oil, garlic, and toasted pine nuts) to a food processor, and pressing the button to give it a whirl, pesto is as simple to make as it is delicious. If you want to add some variety to your pesto (the word pesto, which means "paste," comes from the Italian *pestare*, to grind or crush), try making it with baby spinach, mint, or parsley instead of basil (it's a good way to use up tender greens), and using walnuts or almonds instead of pine nuts.

Kids also have a good time mixing and sifting ingredients for pie or tart dough and then rolling it out. For an early summer version, cherries are a natural choice. They are the first stone fruit to ripen in spring and kids love them (make sure you pit them first for the younger ones). I have such fond childhood memories of climbing my grandparents' huge cherry tree and eating handfuls of the fat, juicy Bing fruits. For the sheet-pan tart I've made on the next pages, I used both fresh cherries and a jam made from them. Then I saved some extra tart dough so that the kids could cut out fun shapes to top the tart, making it truly personal.

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Trenette with Pesto Genoa–Style

TRENETTE CON PESTO ALLA GENOVESE

Trenette is the classic shape used for this dish in Liguria, the region where pesto originated, but linguine makes a good substitute. Pesto is classically made in a mortar and pestle—but a food processor makes this quick and easy for a weeknight. Don't limit your summer pestos to just basil. You can use a combination of soft herbs like parsley, mint, or cilantro, or tender baby greens like arugula, spinach, or kale. This is a wonderful dish for small hands in the kitchen—let them smell the herbs as they pluck the leaves from the stems.

Yield

Serves 6

Ingredients

4 cups loosely packed fresh basil leaves
¼ cup toasted pine nuts
2 cloves garlic, crushed and peeled
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 pound dried trenette
½ cup grated Grana Padano, plus more for serving

Recipe

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil for the pasta. Combine the basil, pine nuts, garlic, ½ teaspoon salt, and several grinds of pepper in the work bowl of a food processor. Pulse to make a chunky paste. With the processor running, add the olive oil in a slow, steady stream to make a smooth pesto.

Add the pasta to the boiling water. Cook until al dente. Drain, reserving 1 cup pasta cooking water. Combine the hot pasta and the pesto in a large serving bowl. Sprinkle with the grated cheese. Toss well, adding enough pasta water to achieve a creamy sauce that coats the pasta. Serve, passing additional cheese at the table.



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Cherry Jam Tart

CROSTATA CON MARMELLATA DI CILIEGIE

Baking with children is like a hands-on art project in the kitchen. Here, children can help sift ingredients and get their hands in the bowl to mix. Use fun cookie cutters for the dough cutouts on top—flowers or hearts or animals, whatever appeals to the young ones in your family. Cherry jam is kid friendly, but you can use any jam that you like.

Yield

Serves 8 or more

Ingredients for the dough

3 cups all purpose flour,
plus more for rolling the dough
½ cup sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon kosher salt
2 sticks (1 cup) cold unsalted butter,
cut into small pieces
2 large egg yolks, chilled
½ cup ice water, or as needed
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Ingredients for the filling

2 cups chunky cherry jam
1 cup chopped pitted Bing cherries
1 large egg, beaten
Sugar, for sprinkling

Recipe

For the dough, stir together the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a large mixing bowl. Drop in the butter and toss to coat in the flour. Use the tips of your fingers to rub the butter into the flour until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs.

Whisk the egg yolks, water, and vanilla together and drizzle over the flour mixture. Toss quickly to form a rough, shaggy dough, adding a little more water if it is still too dry and crumbly. Turn the dough out onto a floured surface and knead a few times just to bring the dough together. Form into a flat rectangle, wrap in plastic, and chill 1 hour (or up to 1 day). (You can also make the dough in a food processor.)

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Cut off two thirds of the dough and roll into a 12-by-16-inch rectangle. Fit the dough into a 10-by-15-inch rimmed baking sheet, folding the dough over the sides and trimming it flush to the edge of the pan. Combine the jam and cherries in a medium bowl and toss to combine. Spread evenly in the bottom crust. Fold the edges of the bottom crust over to form a border.

Roll the remaining piece of dough to a ¼-inch thickness on your floured work surface. Use a variety of small cookie cutters to cut out shapes and lay over top of the filling, leaving spaces in between. Brush the edges and shapes with the beaten egg and sprinkle with sugar. Bake until the crust is golden brown and the filling is bubbling, about 30 to 40 minutes. Let cool on a rack before cutting into squares to serve.

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9 INGREDIENTS YOU SHOULD ALWAYS HAVE IN YOUR KITCHEN

The first secret to a good meal is a well-stocked and organized pantry. It will allow you to always have on hand the ingredients you need for any occasion. Use very simple ingredients, whose flavors, however, are so intense that they make a difference.

ITALIAN PANTRY



BARLEY

A wonderfully versatile cereal grain, barley has a rich nutlike flavor and an appealing chewy, pasta-like consistency.

It's true that barley is essential for brewing beer, but it's also ideal for mushroom and vegetable soups, as a risotto, in a salad, served alongside braised meats and in stews, and even as a dessert with honey and dried fruits and nuts.

When cooking barley, remember that its texture will range from soft to chewy, depending on how long and with how much water it's cooked. You can find barley in several forms: pearled (some or all of the outer bran layer and hull removed), hulled (minimally processed to leave part of the bran layer), and flaked (similar to oatmeal). Store barley in an air-tight container in cool, dark place.

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BURRATA

An artisanal cow's-milk cheese made in Andria, Puglia, burrata has a distinctly creamy texture.

In Italian, burrata means "buttered," and this cheese, lives up to its name. The outer casing of burrata is solid mozzarella, but the softer inside contains mozzarella and cream. It is sometimes made from bufala (Italian Mediterranean water buffalo) milk, especially when produced in Lazio, near Rome.

Burrata's rich texture and delicate flavor make it a great companion to prosciutto crudo, sautéed broccoli rabe, nice crusty bread, or fresh tomatoes and olive oil.

You can find this artisanal cheese at import and gourmet stores. Burrata has a very short shelf life and must be eaten within days after it is made.

VERMOUTH

A fortified wine served most often in cocktails and aperitifs, vermouth is infused with aromatic bark, flowers, seeds, herbs (such as wormwood), and spices. Fortification comes in the form of spirits such as brandy. There are three types of vermouth: Sweet red is used in cocktails like the Manhattan and Negroni; dry (white) is a key part of the Martini; and bianco, a lightly sweeter white to golden-colored vermouth. All are made from a neutral white grape such as trebbiano, but caramelized sugar gives the sweet red vermouth its color. Originated in Italy's Piemonte in the 18th century, vermouth was then usually sipped on its own as an apéritif. Now, in addition to its place in cocktail culture, vermouth is used in cooking anywhere you might use a wine, such as in a sauce for chicken or fish.



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FREGOLA

Fregola is a hearty little pearl of a Sardinian toasted pasta that is nutty, semolina-based, and looks like Israeli couscous. In Italian, fregola means "crumbs." It is made with water shaken by hand over the semolina flour on a baking sheet, then shaken on the sheet until small bits and balls of dough (fregola) are formed; they are then oven-toasted.

Larger fregola can be served sauced like any other pasta, and all sizes can be an accompaniment to braised meats or stews or mixed into salads. You can easily make your own, but packaged traditional fregola Sarda is available from many online and gourmet suppliers.

Fregola keeps well. Store it in a jar or zip-top bag, or frozen.

WHITE WINE VINEGAR

Made from fermented white wine to about a 5 percent acetic content, white wine vinegar is milder and less acidic than red-wine and cider vinegars. It is delicious in a salad dressing, for pickled vegetables, sour sauces, and marinades (such as the scapece in this issue) for mild meats like chicken.

While you can certainly ferment your own vinegar from white wine, there are many good brands to choose from. Try a variety to find your perfect balance of acidity and sweetness.

Keep white-wine vinegar in glass containers in a cool, dark place. It will last about 6 months after opening the bottle.



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GREEK YOGURT

The beauty of Greek yogurt is its thick, creamy texture and tangy flavor. That's because it has been strained to remove some of the liquid (whey), so it is more solid than regular varieties. Traditionally made with cultured sheep's milk, many brands today use cow's milk.

Nutritionally, Greek yogurt is higher in protein, calories, and fat than regular yogurt.

Dips and sauces get creamy with Greek yogurt, as do chilled soups. It makes a good marinade for meats or simply eat it on its own with fruit.

To make your own Greek yogurt, strain double the amount of regular plain yogurt in a cheesecloth-lined colander until it reaches the desired thickness, 2 to 3 hours. Keep yogurt refrigerated.

ROSEMARY

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is a small evergreen shrub that is a member of the mint family. Buy fresh rosemary sprigs; they have a wonderful piney fragrance, which is duller when the herb is dried.

Use aromatic rosemary in stews and marinades, with roasted potatoes, and when grilling fish and meats or roasting meats like lamb.

Fresh rosemary sprigs will keep in the refrigerator, wrapped in a damp paper towel in a plastic bag, for a week. To freeze the fresh leaves, submerge them in a small container of water, and freeze.



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FENNEL SEEDS

You may be used to cooking with the bulbs and fronds of the fennel plant (*Foeniculum vulgare*) but may not often use the seeds. A traditional Italian spice for thousands of years and equally important in Middle Eastern and South Asian cooking, fennel has a sweet licorice flavor that mellows when cooked.

The pale green or light brown seeds are a staple of sausage, of course, and are a delightful addition to spice rubs for meats like pork or chicken. Shrimp is delicious when cooked in water aromatic with spices like fennel seed. And they add a spark to sauces, curries, and a homemade giardiniera (see next page).

Store fennel seed in an airtight container, in a cool, dry, dark place for up to six months.

GIARDINIERA

Giardiniera, which translates to "the gardener's style," is a preserved and tangy assortment of vegetables that can include carrots, onions celery, cauliflower, string beans, peppers, and more. With its incredible crunch, this vegetable mix pairs perfectly with an antipasto or with an assortment of Italian salumi and cured meats and adds flavor and texture to sandwiches and salads.

I like to make my own giardiniera during the growing season, serving some immediately and also preserving some using water-bath canning methods in order to always have it in my pantry. There are wonderful brands of giardiniera, such as Cento, which I also rely on, and that are staples in the Italian kitchen.

I refrigerate my freshly made giardiniera at least 24 hours before serving; it stays fresh for several weeks.



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LIDIA'S ITALY AT HOME.indd 22 02/07/21 18:34

IT'S WINE O'CLOCK:

Puglia Dreaming

- By Giuseppe Rosati -

If the band the Mamas and Papas had been born in Italy, their greatest hit would probably not have been "California Dreaming" but "Puglia Dreaming." Puglia has always been considered the California of Italy. Long, sunny coasts that start at the Adriatic Sea and flow into the Ionian Sea form the heel of Italy's boot, and the region has a great agricultural history. Its sun-kissed land is generous with fruits and vegetables that thrive next to some of the most beautiful beaches in the Mediterranean. Puglia's growth in tourism during the last decade is dizzying. Primarily an Italian tourist destination in the 1980s and '90s, the mid-2000s saw Puglia open up to the international market, thanks to the construction of *masserie* and resorts which, while maintaining a typically Apulian architecture, design, and atmosphere, offer the services and hospitality of elite tourist destinations. Places like Masseria San Domenico and Borgo Egnazia are counted among the finest hotels in the world, so much so that they were chosen by the pop star Madonna for a birthday celebration. What's more, on this occasion, between the raw fish appetizer and an orecchietta alla barese first course, only Apulian wines were served. This attests not only to the wines' superb quality but also the outstanding work of local producers who, from this rich land, have been able to carve a path forward of both quantity and quality, providing a clear value-add for the region's growth.

Puglia offers a selection of indigenous grape varietals such as Primitivo, Negroamaro, and Nero di Troia that are among the most important reds. White varietals include Verdeca, Bombino Bianco, and Bianco d 'Alessano, as well as international varietals that over the years have found themselves a home in this region. Puglia, together with Sicily, makes up an area with the greatest Italian wine production that at the same time offers wines of the highest quality.

When talking about Apulian wines I like to start with the reds that, along with rosés, represent the most interesting on offer. Primitivo rosso is the most common indigenous varietal and is a wine with a rich and deep structure. Chocolatey, with hints of blackberry and plum, it is the pride of the Apulian tradition. Among the best tastings from last year are: "Torcicoda" 2018, of the Tormaresca cellars (a beautiful estate owned by the Antinori family that has contributed to the rebirth of this territory). It

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is a good drinking wine, ideal for summer picnics. Primitivo "Lirica" 2017, from the Produttori di Manduria winery, one of the oldest and most productive in the area, has notes of tobacco, black pepper, and cherry jam.

"Nonna Cecca" 2016, of the Fabiana winery, is a Primitivo with strength and character representing Puglia from one of the most promising Apulian wineries.

Another important player in the rebirth of Apulian wine is the company owned by Bruno Vespa, a well-known Italian journalist and a lover of fine wine. He produces excellent Primitivos, including the "Bruno di Vespa" 2019, which is fresh and approachable, while the flagship "Raccontami" 2018 is more important and best represents the strength of this varietal.

Alongside Primitivo, considered the "purebred" of Apulian grapes, there are other varietals which are enjoying special appreciation. Among these I find Negroamaro the most interesting. More spicy and herbaceous than the Primitivo, it expresses itself well in the wines of Leone de Castris, a historic Apulian company, with Salice Salentino Riserva 2017 one of the happiest bottles of this year. In the same 2017 vintage, another convincing Negroamaro is from the Fabiana winery. Negroamaro lends itself to being blended and Cantina Due Palme, one of the most active and important cooperatives in Italy, offers a great 2010 "Selvarossa–Riserva del Fondatore," a blend of Negroamaro and Malvasia Nera.

Puglia is a land of great enterprise and vision. When modern Italian enology began, it was a center for great experiments and new ideas. The first Italian rosé was born in Apulia in 1943 from Leone de Castris: "Five Roses" has become a benchmark of rosé. Made from Negroamaro grapes, it is an ideal wine for a summer meal, perhaps by the sea or the pool. The "Five Roses" experience has created an Apulian school dedicated to rosé wines, a sort of Italian Provençal that can be found in wine shops and restaurants around the world. Worth mentioning are the Rosato di Rosa del Golfo by the young and talented Damiano Calo' and the Calafuria di Tormaresca made from Negroamaro grapes. Both are beautifully fresh and fragrant and represent the best of rosé wines in Apulia.

Alongside the reds and rosés there is also a significant and growing production of whites. Among the white wines, of particular importance is "Askos" of Masseria Lì Veli from the Falvo family



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and made from 100-percent Verdeca grapes. With notes of tropical fruit, lemon, and fresh spices, it is, when served chilled, the perfect companion to summer meals. Another happy interpretation of Verdeca is offered by the Produttori di Manduria with "Alice" 2020. Fresh hints of summer fruit, Persian melon, and noble spices make a lovely aperitif or accompaniment to a seafood dish. An area of particular interest for whites is the Gravina area, where the Botromagno winery, now run by the brothers Beniamino and Alberto D'Agostino, has over the years carved out an important position for itself and its increasingly convincing wines. Botromagno's "Poggio al Bosco," their Gravina Bianco made with Greco and white Malvasia grapes, is a white with great structure and body and is the result of a rigorous selection in the vineyard and meticulous work in the cellar. We started this journey talking about Apulia as the California of Italy, and I would like to close by pointing out two wines that recall the great California Cabernet Sauvignons. First is the "1943 del Presidente" of the Due Palme winery, a blend of Primitivo and Aglianico whose passage in barriques makes it especially deep and structured. Another wine that surprised me for its strength and elegance is the Botromagno "Pier delle Vigne" from Montepulciano and Aglianico grapes, which, after 12 months in barrique is particularly rich and deep. I hope you look for these wines at your trusted wine shop or online so you can experience a wonderful taste of Puglia.



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CELEBRATING AT THE TABLE:

Good-News Food

When good news comes around— a birthday, an anniversary, a graduation, a shower for an upcoming wedding or a baby on the way—it's time to gather family and friends to celebrate! In our family, we don't need much of an excuse; you name it and we have probably had a meal to mark it.

We may love to put on a party, but we don't let elaborate menus and planning get in the way of our fun—we keep things easygoing, with dishes that can be prepared ahead or that come together fairly quickly and that can be served buffet-style. That's particularly easy in summer, when there's wonderful produce in season, and many foods require very little cooking and can be served cold, at room temperature, or straight from grill to platter.

The menu I've created on the following pages can work for almost any summer celebration. I've kept things light, refreshing, and colorful, with lots of fresh vegetables and fruits. Start with a first course of soup, which, in any season, sets a nice tone for the meal to come. In warm weather I like to serve chilled soups, and when my garden is bursting with tomatoes, I take advantage of yellow tomatoes and sweet corn for a make-ahead soup with Greek yogurt, which adds a touch of creamy tartness.

A salad of shrimp with honeydew and cantaloupe melons can be a side dish or made into an entrée if you're inviting shrimp fans. I give my salad some shaved fennel for a bit of anise flavor and a finished look with the fennel fronds. I have a family of spice lovers, so I contrast the cool soups and salads with Cornish hens that I've made alla diavola and serve with a spicy salsa verde. Butterflying the hens makes them perfect for the grill. Alongside, I serve a crunchy slaw of savoy cabbage and bell pepper, topped with parsley.

For dessert, fresh fruit and light cookies, like anise-flavored crisp, buttery Italian pizzelle, are just right. They're made with a special pizzelle iron to get that beautiful, waffled shape, so if you love these cookies, as I do, invest in a pizzelle iron. Most of all, invest in sharing the good news and happy events of your life with people you love. You'd be surprised at how many reasons you can find to celebrate around the table.

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Chilled Corn and Yellow Tomato Soup

ZUPPA FREDDA DI MAIS E POMODORI CON YOGURT

This soup is best made a day ahead. Let it chill thoroughly in the refrigerator to let the flavors meld. Of course, you could use red summer tomatoes, but the all-yellow color palette here creates a particularly bright and sunny dish.

Yield

Serves 8

Ingredients

6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 small sweet onion, finely chopped
1 stalk celery, finely chopped
1 yellow bell pepper, finely chopped
2 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary
2 pounds ripe yellow tomatoes, chopped
4 ears corn, kernels removed from the cob (about 2 cups kernels)
6 cups water
Kosher salt and peperoncino
½ cup full-fat Greek yogurt, plus more for serving
White wine vinegar
Diced tomato, corn kernels, celery leaves, chopped chives, and extra-virgin olive oil for garnish.

Recipe

Heat 3 tablespoons of the olive oil in a medium Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the onion, celery, bell pepper, and rosemary. Cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes and cook until they begin to break down, about 4 minutes. Add the corn, 6 cups water, 2 teaspoons salt, and a large pinch of peperoncino. Bring to a simmer and cook until all of the vegetables are tender, about 15 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool slightly.

Add the yogurt and vinegar to the pot and blend with an immersion blender (or use a regular blender, blending in batches). Drizzle in the remaining olive oil and blend until smooth and glossy. Cover and chill until very cold, at least 3 hours, preferably overnight.

Serve in chilled bowls or glasses, garnished with yogurt, diced yellow tomato, corn kernels, celery leaves, chopped chives, and a drizzle of olive oil.

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Shrimp and Melon Salad

INSALATA DI GAMBERI E MELONE

This salad is the perfect addition to a summer meal when you want something light and refreshing but still substantial. The recipe easily doubles to feed a larger crowd. You can cook the shrimp, keeping them well chilled, a day ahead of time. To butterfly the shrimp, run a sharp paring knife down the center of the shrimp's back, splitting them almost down the middle but leaving them intact on the underside.

Yield

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice (reserve lemon halves)
2 teaspoons fennel seeds
2 teaspoons coriander seeds
2 fresh bay leaves
l pound large shrimp, peeled and deveined,
butterflied down the top center vein
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
l medium fennel bulb, cored and thinly sliced,
½ cup tender fronds reserved
2 stalks celery, thinly sliced on the bias
¼ cantaloupe, peeled and sliced
¼ honeydew, peeled and sliced

Recipe

Combine 2 quarts water, the lemon halves, fennel seeds, coriander seeds, and bay leaves in a medium Dutch oven. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and cook l5 minutes to blend the flavors. Add the shrimp and simmer until just cooked through, 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer to an ice bath to cool completely. Drain, rinse and pat very dry.

Whisk the lemon juice and olive oil in a large serving bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Add the fennel, celery, honeydew, and cantaloupe and toss well. Season again with salt and pepper. Refrigerate for 30 minutes to let the flavors blend before serving. Add the fennel fronds, toss and serve.



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Spicy Cornish Hens with Salsa Verde

POLLO ALLA DIAVOLA CON SALSA VERDE

This same marinade would also work well with bone-in chicken parts. For a quick weeknight version, use chicken cutlets and marinate for 20 to 30 minutes. Adjust your cooking time accordingly. Splitting the hens in half will help them cook faster and accommodate the smaller and large appetites at your table—allowing 1 or 2 halves per person.

Yield

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients for the hens

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil,
plus more for brushing the grill
4 hot pickled cherry peppers, chopped,
plus 3 tablespoons brine from the jar
8 garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
2 sprigs rosemary, needles removed
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
4 Cornish hens (about 1 ½ pounds each),
split in half through the breast
and backbone to make 8 halves

Ingredients for the spicy salsa verde

2 cups loosely packed fresh parsley leaves
3 scallions, chopped
2 tablespoons drained capers in brine
Zest and juice of ½ lemon
1 pickled cherry pepper, chopped
2 anchovy fillets
1 garlic clove, smashed
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Recipe

For the hens, whisk the olive oil, cherry peppers and brine, garlic, and rosemary in a large non-reactive container. Season with 1 teaspoon salt and a generous grinding of black pepper. Add the hens and toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate at least 2 hours or up to overnight, tossing occasionally.

Preheat an outdoor grill with one side of the burners on medium high, the other side on low. For the salsa verde, combine the parsley, scallions, capers, lemon zest and juice, cherry pepper, anchovies, and garlic in the work bowl of a food processor. Pulse to make a chunky paste. With the machine running, add the olive oil in a slow, steady stream to make a smooth, bright green sauce. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside in a serving bowl, covered, while you grill the hens.

Remove the hens from the marinade. Season with salt and pepper. Brush the grill with olive oil. Set the hens, skin side up, on the hotter side of the grill. Cover and grill until the underside is lightly charred and releases easily from the grill, about 10 minutes. Flip and continue to grill, covered, until the hens are cooked through and the skin is crisp, about 165 degrees F on an instant-read thermometer stuck into the thickest part of the thigh, about 10 to 15 minutes more. (If the skin begins to burn before the hens are cooked through, move to the cooler side of the grill.) Let rest 10 minutes. Serve the spicy salsa verde on the side for drizzling.

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Savoy Cabbage and Bell Pepper Slaw

INSALATA DI VERZA E PEPERONI

If you're making this salad for a gathering, it can be made several hours ahead. Cover and keep refrigerated until you're ready to serve. Leftovers make a great topper for a turkey or roast beef sandwich the next day.

Yield

Serves 6 to 8

Ingredients

¼ cup cider vinegar
l tablespoon grainy mustard
l teaspoon sugar
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
½ medium red onion, thinly sliced
½ head savoy cabbage, cored and shredded
l small red bell pepper, thinly sliced
l small yellow bell pepper, thinly sliced
l medium carrot, shredded
¼ cup chopped fresh Italian parsley

Recipe

Whisk the vinegar, mustard, sugar, l teaspoon salt and a generous grinding of black pepper in a large serving bowl. Whisk in the olive oil to make a smooth dressing. Add the red onion, cabbage, both bell peppers, and carrots and toss well to coat in the dressing. Add the parsley. Toss and serve.



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Pizzelle

These crisp cookies are a popular sweet in Abruzzo for celebratory events. They are light, simple, and delicious and are a great accompaniment to gelato or sorbet—or on their own, with a platter of ripe summer fruits. Pizzelle can be made several days ahead and kept in a sealed plastic container until serving, though dust with the confectioner's sugar at the last minute.

Yield

Makes about 18 (4-inch) pizzelle

Ingredients

1 ¾ cups all-purpose flour
1 ½ teaspoons baking powder
¼ teaspoon kosher salt
3 large eggs
¾ cup sugar
1 ½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
½ teaspoon anise or almond extract
1 stick (½ cup) unsalted butter, melted and cooled
Vegetable-oil cooking spray
Confectioner's sugar, for dusting

Recipe

Preheat your pizzelle iron. Stir the flour, baking powder, and salt together in a medium bowl. Whisk the eggs, sugar, vanilla and anise in a large bowl until smooth and slightly foamy. Stir in the flour mixture just to combine. Stir in the melted butter just until the batter is smooth; don't overmix. (The batter will be thick.)

Lightly spray the preheated pizzelle iron with cooking spray. Dollop about 2 tablespoons batter into each mold and close the lid. Cook until the pizzelle are golden, about 1 minute. Transfer to a rack to cool and crisp. Repeat with the remaining batter. Break off any rough edges. When ready to serve, dust the cooled pizzelle with confectioner's sugar.



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KEEPING IT LIGHT:

Healthy Pairings

Cooking healthy meals for ourselves and our families doesn't have to mean forsaking any of the pleasure. It just means getting to know and cooking ingredients we may not be as familiar with and pairing our more substantial foods like meats and pasta with plenty of vegetables and fruits.

Take whole grains, for example. Ancient grains like farro and barley, some of the world's first cultivated foods, are rich in fiber and protein and they have wonderful nutty flavors and chewy textures. They also have the firmness needed to stand up to a salad, as in the recipe on the following pages. With the idea of healthy pairings in mind, I combined the barley with a lean protein (in this case chicken), and a generous portion of fresh vegetables and a beautifully tart giardiniera to make a satisfying and balanced one-dish meal.

To keep things light with meats, I often choose pork loin chops (a leaner cut) that I either brine first or salt before grilling, which helps keep the meat tender. Bone-in chops have a bit more fat around the bone, which gives them a meatier flavor and also helps keep the meat from drying out while cooking. Then I follow the lead of cooks in Emilia-Romagna, who pair the grilled pork chops with a fruit-filled mostarda, the Italian sweet-and-sour, chutney-like preserves. In our issue 3 of the magazine we shared a peach-and-cherry mostarda, and here I've combined the sweetness of plums and dried apricots with the pleasant bite of red onion. Use any leftover mostarda on your next cheeseboard; it pairs equally well with ripe and mild cheeses.

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Barley Salad with Chicken and Giardiniera

INSALATA D'ORZO CON POLLO E GIARDINIERA

If you are short on time, you can make this salad with quick-cooking barley, which takes only 10 to 15 minutes to cook, though I prefer the real thing (pearl barley), time permitting. Good quality prepared giardiniera is a wonderful pantry ingredient to have on hand as a briny, crunchy addition to salads and sandwiches. Of course, if you have leftover roast chicken, you can use that here instead of poaching your own.

Yield

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

1 cup pearl barley
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 boneless skinless chicken breasts (about 8 ounces each)
2 garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
1 lemon, zest removed in strips with a vegetable peeler and juiced
1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
1 cup coarsely chopped drained prepared giardiniera
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
4 cups loosely packed baby spinach
¼ cup fresh parsley leaves

Recipe

Bring 2 quarts of salted water to boil in a large saucepan. Add the barley and cook until the barley is tender but still slightly chewy, about 40 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold water. Spread on a baking sheet to cool.

Put the chicken in a medium pot with water to cover by about an inch. Add the garlic and lemon zest strips. Season the water with 2 teaspoons salt. Bring the water to a gentle simmer. Simmer until the chicken is cooked through, about 15 minutes. Remove and let cool. Shred or chop the chicken into bite-sized pieces.

Combine the cooled chicken and barley in a large serving bowl with the cherry tomatoes and giardiniera. Drizzle with the lemon juice and olive oil. Season with salt and pepper and toss well. Add the spinach and parsley leaves. Toss just to combine and serve immediately.



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Grilled Pork Chops with Plum and Red Onion Mostarda

BRACIOLE DI MAIALE ALLA GRIGLIA CON MOSTARDA DI PRUGNE E CIPOLLE ROSSE

Mostarda is an Italian condiment, usually served with boiled meat, and is made with a combination of fresh and dried fruits. You can double or triple this quick version, as it will keep in the refrigerator for a week or two and is great to have on hand to add flavor to lean grilled meats. It's also a lovely addition to a cheese board.

Yield

Serves 4

Ingredients for the mostarda

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
1 small red onion, chopped
1 teaspoon mustard seeds
Kosher salt
¼ teaspoon peperoncino
2 tablespoons sugar
¼ cup red wine vinegar
4 plums, chopped
½ cup chopped dried apricots

Ingredients for the pork chops

1 teaspoon ground fennel
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
4 (1-inch-thick) bone-in pork loin chops, about 10 ounces each
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Recipe

For the mostarda, heat the olive oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the red onion and cook until crisp-tender, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the mustard seeds and cook until they begin to pop, about 1 minute. Season with ½ teaspoon salt and the peperoncino. Add the sugar, vinegar, and ½ cup water. Bring to a simmer and cook until the sugar dissolves. Add the plums and apricots. Bring to a brisk simmer and cook until the mostarda is thickened and syrupy and the fruit is tender, about 10 to 15 minutes. Let cool slightly while you cook the pork chops.

Preheat an outdoor grill or grill pan to medium heat. Combine the fennel, 1 teaspoon kosher salt and ½ teaspoon black pepper in a small bowl. Sprinkle all over the chops. Brush the chops with the olive oil.

Place the chops on the grill. Grill until charred on the underside, about 5 to 6 minutes. Flip and grill until just cooked through, about 145 degrees F in the center of the chop on an instant-read thermometer, about 4 to 5 minutes more. Serve the chops with the mostarda.

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LIDIA ENTERTAINS:

Festive Clambake

Being at the beach or on the sea has always energized me, from childhood days spent diving, swimming, and strolling along the rocky beaches of Istria or fishing with my Uncle Emilio, to today, when my family visits the nearby Long Island shore or has spent part of our summers in Friuli, sailing and swimming every chance we get. (We're looking forward to returning to Italy when it is safe for everyone.) In those early years, we packed sandwiches, fruit, and (if we were lucky) lemonade in our jute bags and picnicked in the shade of the pine forest that adjoined the shore. They were the simplest of meals, but always tasted incredibly special, eaten at the beach.

We continue that tradition today, going to the markets early in the morning to get the best fresh produce, then home to pack snacks and head for the beach. There it's a multi-generation gathering—from me to Tanya and Joe and their kids, along with many cousins. After our day at the beach is done, we return home to start cooking, with that many more hands to help with the meal!

The sea and classic New England clambakes inspired me to create a meal that's all-American with distinctly Italian style. That begins with a refreshing cocktail with an unusual combination—Campari, orange juice, and an IPA, whose herbal, bittersweet citrus flavors, blend to make a refreshing, bubbly drink.

For the clambake, all the traditional shellfish is there—from lobster and shrimp to littleneck clams and mussels—along with Italian sausage and basil. The beauty of this clambake is that instead of digging a pit at the beach to bake the seafood, you can prepare it at home. With all that delicious seafood, all you need to make a meal is a loaf of good bread fragrant with garlic, and a crisp salad. I like to combine the crunch of just-picked string beans with capers and basil. It's simply the freshest taste of summer, made that much better when you share it with family (especially after a day at the beach)!

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Campari IPA Cocktail

Orange juice offsets the bitterness of Campari and the IPA, making this refreshing cocktail ideal for a casual outdoor summer gathering. You can double or triple this recipe for a larger crowd and serve in a pitcher.

Yield

Makes 2 cocktails

Ingredients

3 ounces Campari
3 ounces freshly squeezed orange juice
Ice cubes
1 (12-ounce) bottle chilled IPA of your choice
Orange wedges, for garnish

Recipe

Divide the Campari and orange juice between 2 highball glasses and stir. Add ice cubes and top with IPA. Garnish with orange wedges and serve immediately.

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Mixed Bean, Caper, and Basil Salad

INSALATA DI FAGIOLINI, CAPPERI E BASILICO

I love growing a variety of beans in my garden and this salad is a wonderful opportunity to use them. You can use this mix or whatever pole beans are available at your farmer's market. Add boiled egg, canned tuna, or leftover roast chicken and this side salad becomes a meal.

Yield

Serves 6 to 8

Ingredients

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
8 ounces green beans, trimmed
8 ounces yellow wax beans, trimmed
8 ounces sugar snap peas or another variety of summer pole bean, trimmed
⅓ cup drained capers in brine
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves

Recipe

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil. Add the beans and cook until just tender, about 5 minutes. Transfer to an ice bath to stop the cooking and chill. Drain the beans and pat very dry.

Transfer beans to a serving bowl and add the capers. Drizzle with the vinegar and oil. Season with salt and a generous grinding of pepper, remembering that the capers are salty. Toss well. Roughly tear the basil leaves over top, toss, and serve.



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Clambake Italian–Style

A traditional clambake is cooked in a pit on the beach in New England—but my at-home version is just as delicious and incorporates a few twists that make it my own. I like to cook the lobsters whole so they stay moist, but feel free to split them once they're cooked so all of your guests can enjoy them. Use the largest pot you have here!

Yield

Serves 8

Ingredients

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
1 pound sweet Italian sausage links
2 pounds baby red potatoes (1 inch diameter or less), halved if larger
3 heads garlic, split crosswise
2 cups dry white wine
Kosher salt and peperoncino
6 ears corn, shucked and broken in half
4 lobsters (about 1 ¼ to 1 ½ pounds each)
2 dozen littleneck clams, scrubbed
1 pound mussels, scrubbed
1 pound large shrimp
1 bunch scallions, chopped
2 cups loosely packed fresh basil leaves
Lemon wedges, for serving
Tomato Garlic Bread (page 48), for serving

Recipe

Heat a 16-quart or larger lobster pot or stockpot over medium. Add the olive oil and brown the sausage links all over, about 5 minutes. Remove to a plate and cut into 1- to 2-inch chunks. Return to the pot along with the potatoes and garlic. Cook, stirring, until they begin to brown, about 5 minutes. Add the wine and 1 cup water. Season with 2 teaspoons salt and ½ teaspoon peperoncino. Cover, adjust the heat, and simmer for 5 minutes.

Add the corn and lobsters on top. Cover and simmer for 5 minutes. Add the clams and simmer for 5 minutes more. Finally, add the mussels and shrimp. Cover and simmer until all of the clams and mussels have opened, 5 to 10 minutes more, discarding any that do not open. Add the scallions and tear the basil over top. Toss.

Transfer the clambake and juices to 1 or more large serving vessels. Serve with lemon wedges and garlic bread.



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Tomato–Garlic Bread

PANE AL POMODORO E AGLIO

Yield

Serves 6 to 8

Ingredients

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
4 garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
1 (18-inch) loaf seedless Italian bread
(or 2 smaller loaves), split lengthwise
1 ½ teaspoons dried oregano,
preferably Sicilian oregano on the branch
1 ripe tomato, halved
Kosher salt

Recipe

Combine the olive oil and garlic in a small bowl and let steep 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.

Set the bread cutside-up on a baking sheet. Brush with the oil. Rub the garlic pieces on the bread, leaving them on the bread. Sprinkle with the oregano. Bake until the bread is crisp and golden, about 8 to 10 minutes.

Remove any large garlic chunks. Rub the cut sides of the tomatoes on the bread, letting the juices soak in. Drizzle with a little more olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Cut into pieces and serve immediately.



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ITALIAN-AMERICAN FAVORITES:

Caponata

The bright, intense flavors of Sicilian cooking come together in caponata, the traditional appetizer, side dish, or condiment of fried mixed vegetables, capers, nuts, and dried fruit, all marinated in an agrodolce, a sour-sweet sauce made with vinegar and sugar. Agrodolce as a preservative is especially popular in the coastal areas of Italy, where once sailors and fishermen needed vegetables and fish to be preserved on their long sea voyages. But when you have a combination as delicious as caponata, where eggplant is usually the star, it was only a matter of time before caponata began to appear on tables throughout Italy and traveled to America with Sicilian immigrants. Now, of course, it's hard to find an Italian American restaurant that doesn't serve caponata or an Italian American family that doesn't have some on hand.

Summer is the perfect time to make your own caponata, when eggplant and tomatoes are at their peak. It's such an easy dish to make, and easy to make ahead and have stashed in the refrigerator (when it sits for a day or more it tastes even better). And there are so many ways to put it to delicious use: on its own, as a side dish, or with an antipasti, slathered on bruschetta, spread on a sandwich of fresh burrata or mozzarella, or served with pasta or grilled meat or fish. I especially like it with grilled tuna.

There are dozens of caponata varieties, like the one from Agrigento that may include honey, garlic, cayenne pepper, and almonds. The classic Palermo version is the one I make most often, with eggplant, tomatoes, onions, celery, olives (I like big, fat green Cerignola olives), and capers for saltiness. I also include red peppers and zucchini, pine nuts for a nice crunch, and golden raisins for sweetness. Some versions of the recipe include fresh basil, but I like to use mint instead. Its bright flavor is just the right touch for this Sicilian classic.

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Caponata

Making caponata is a bit of a process but reaps such a reward. At room temperature, it's wonderful as part of an antipasti spread or as a side dish with simply roasted or grilled chicken, pork, or fish when served warm. Leftovers taste great on a sandwich the next day.

Yield

Serves 6

Ingredients

Vegetable oil, as needed
l medium Italian eggplant, cut into l-inch chunks
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
l medium zucchini, cut into ½- inch chunks
l medium red bell pepper, cored, seeded and cut into-l inch chunks
l medium onion, chopped
2 stalks celery, chopped
⅓ cup golden raisins
¼ cup pitted green Italian olives, coarsely chopped
2 tablespoons toasted pine nuts
l tablespoon drained tiny capers in brine
Kosher salt
Pinch peperoncino
3 ripe plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped
¼ cup white wine vinegar
l tablespoon sugar
¼ cup fresh mint leaves, chopped

Recipe

Heat a thin film of vegetable oil in a large skillet over medium. Add the eggplant cubes and fry, stirring and turning them so they cook evenly, until the eggplant is golden brown on all sides, about 5 minutes. Remove the eggplant with a slotted spoon, and drain on a paper-towel-lined plate.

Heat the olive oil in a second large skillet. Add the zucchini and bell pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 5 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and add to the eggplant. Add the onion and celery to the olive oil remaining in second skillet, and cook until the vegetables are wilted, about 5 minutes. Stir in the raisins, green olives, pine nuts, and capers. Season with l teaspoon salt and the peperoncino, and continue cooking, stirring, until the vegetables are soft but not mushy, about 5 minutes. Add the chopped tomatoes, and cook until softened, about 5 minutes.

While the vegetables are cooking, make the sugar-mint syrup. Bring the vinegar to a boil in a small saucepan. Add the sugar and the mint, reduce the heat to low, and simmer until thick and syrupy, about 2 minutes.

Pour the syrup into the skillet with the vegetables and simmer to combine. Stir in the eggplant, zucchini, and pepper mixture and cook to heat through and bring the flavors together, 3 to 4 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature. Leftover caponata keeps well in the refrigerator for 3 to 4 days. Return to room temperature before serving.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ITALIAN

Italian cuisine is a culinary adventure that begins with tradition and authentic products. It continues to evolve and becomes enriched with memories that are made at the table. Grandmothers' recipes focus on simple, healthy and flavorful ingredients and techniques that continue to inspire children and adults for generations.

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Steak... an Italian classic? It's not the first thing that comes to mind when we think about Italy's best-loved dishes. But each region of the country has produce and ingredients that make it unique. In Tuscany, among the many foods that make it such a special place, is the beef that comes from the Chianina longhorn cattle, one of the oldest breeds in the world, and that has been raised in Tuscany, especially in the area around Maremma, outside Florence, for more than two thousand years. The magnificent Chianina, which is herded on the range by Italian cowboys called *butteri*, is also one of the largest cattle breeds and is recognized by its white coat. With the mammoth steaks that come from the Chianina, Tuscan cooks created a signature dish, bistecca alla Fiorentina—the steak (a Porterhouse cut from the rear short loin) is brushed with olive oil, grilled to rare or medium-rare, then brushed (with fresh rosemary sprigs) with a paste of olive oil, fresh rosemary, and sea salt. It tastes of Tuscany's terroir and the Tyrrhenian Sea that borders the Maremma countryside.

While you can't get a Chianina steak in the U.S., you can do the next best thing by using the recipe on the next page and buying a top-quality Porterhouse from a sustainable producer at your favorite butcher's. With it, try a glass of one of Tuscany's exquisite red wines. Among the Tuscan wines is one made by our family's Azienda Agricola Bastianich; we make La Mozza Aragone Maremma Toscana, a blend of Sangiovese, Alicante, Syrah, and Carignan grapes, that we are quite proud of.

With such a substantial main course, a lighter side dish is the way to go. As many Italians do for a vegetarian meal, I like to stuff and bake some of the season's tomatoes. They can be filled with a mixture that includes rice, but for a lighter dish, I stuff mine with a blend of panko, herbs, and cheese. In the recipe here I've used rosemary, to pick up the flavor of the rosemary-brushed steak. In Tuscany you might use the region's short, fat, and ribbed Pisanello tomato, but any good plum tomato will do. It's a meal sure to evoke the pleasures of eating under the Tuscan sun.

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Florentine-Style Steak

BISTECCA FIORENTINA

If it's not grilling weather, you can make this steak on the stovetop. Cook in a large, well-seasoned cast-iron pan over medium heat. This steak is traditionally cooked quite rare. Just cook for a few more minutes on each side for medium rare.

Yield

Serves 6

Ingredients

3 sprigs fresh rosemary
Flaky sea salt
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more as needed
1 (2 ½-inch-thick) Porterhouse steak, about 3 pounds

Recipe

Preheat an outdoor grill to medium.

Remove the needles from one of the rosemary sprigs and finely chop. Sprinkle 2 teaspoons salt on the chopped rosemary needles and chop to make a coarse paste. Scrape the paste onto the blade of the knife and into a small bowl. Stir in the olive oil to make a paste. Set aside.

Brush the steak with a little plain olive oil (not the oil-and-rosemary paste). Season lightly with salt. Place on the grill and cook until the underside is well charred, about 10 minutes. Flip and cook the second side until charred, about 10 minutes more. Pick up the steak with tongs and turn on its side to char the fat, about 2 minutes. Turn and char the other side, 2 minutes more. The steak should read 115 to 120 degrees F on an instant-read thermometer in the center for rare.

Remove the steak to a cutting board and bunch up the 2 remaining rosemary sprigs to use as a brush. Brush the rosemary oil on both sides of the steak. Let rest for 10 minutes.

Cut both steaks away from the sides of the center bone. Slice into ½-inch slices against the grain and serve with a drizzle of olive oil and a sprinkling of flaky salt.

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Crispy Baked Tomatoes

POMODORI AL FORNO CROCCANTI

Yield

Serves 6

Ingredients

6 plum tomatoes
6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 cup panko
¼ cup freshly grated Grana Padano
¼ cup freshly grated pecorino
¼ cup chopped fresh Italian parsley
¼ cup chopped fresh chives
2 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary
½ cup dry white wine

Recipe

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F. Core the tomatoes and halve lengthwise. Remove the seeds. Put the tomatoes on a rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil, season with 1 teaspoon salt and several grinds of pepper. Toss to coat in the oil.

Combine the panko, grated cheeses, parsley, chives, and rosemary in a medium bowl. Season with ½ teaspoon salt and several grinds of pepper. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons olive oil and toss to coat the panko mixture in the oil. Press the panko stuffing into the cavity and on top of the tomatoes. Set stuffing side up on the baking sheet. Pour the wine and remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil in the baking sheet.

Bake until the tomatoes are soft but still hold their shape and the crumb topping is crisp and golden, about 25 minutes, adding a little water to the pan if the juices begin to burn. Serve warm or at room temperature, drizzled with any juices that remain in the baking pan.

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Otranto

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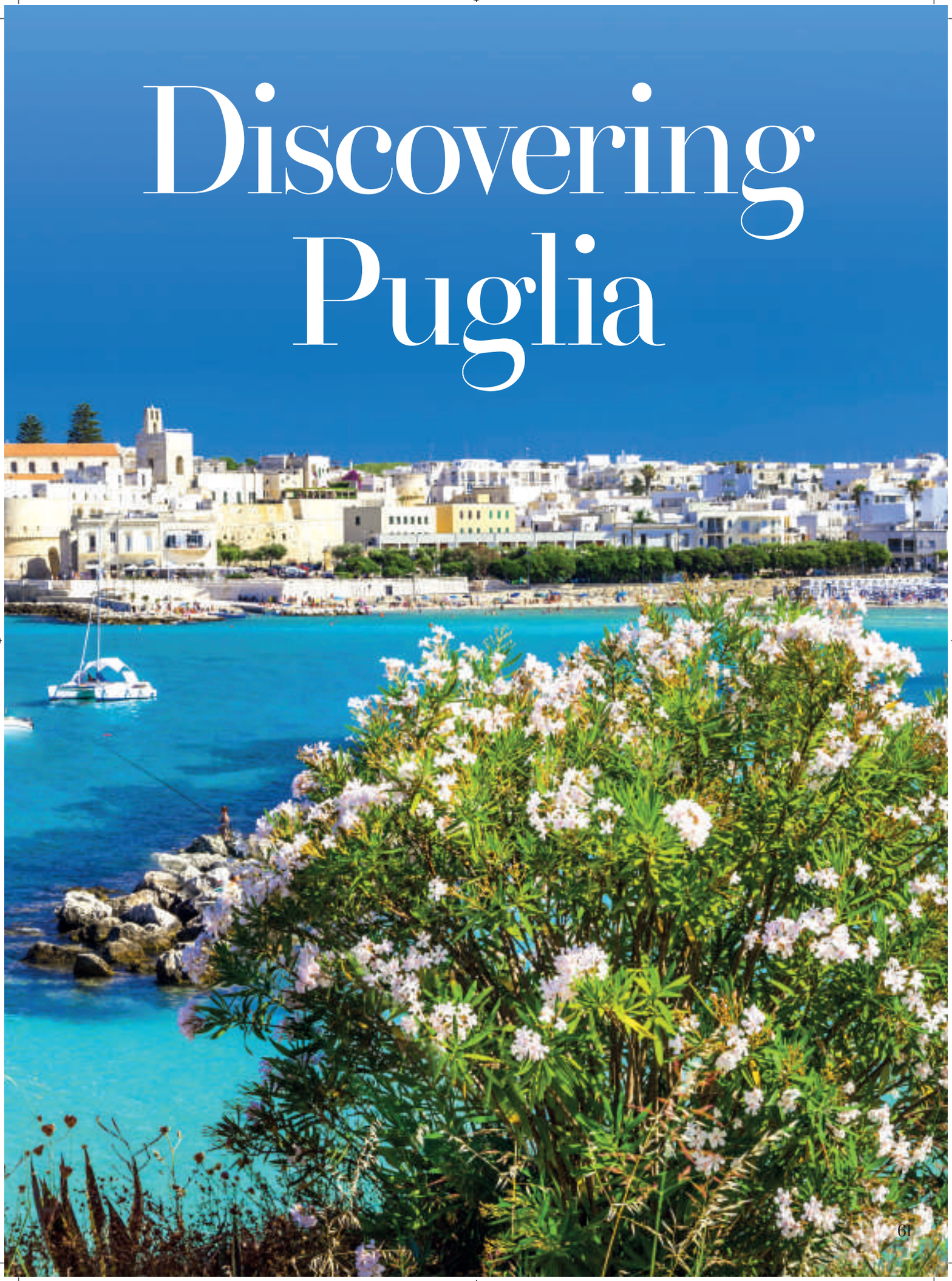
Discovering Puglia



LIDIA'S ITALY AT HOME.indd 61 02/07/21 18:35

As the "heel" of the "boot" that is Italy, Puglia occupies a unique position on the Italian peninsula. This uniqueness, however, does not apply only to geography. Home to some of Italy's most varied, most spectacular beaches; a distinct and fascinating culture; and an exceptional regional cuisine, Puglia is extraordinary in every way. In short, a visit to Puglia is one of the most rewarding one can make in Italy.

With about 500 miles of coastline, it's no surprise that Puglia has some of Italy's finest beaches (as well as its finest seafood). From Gallipoli on the Ionian Sea to Brindisi on the Adriatic, they all boast water that's so clear it seems to have been untouched by humanity. But there's great variety in the surrounding scenery—you can be bathing along a craggy coast one day and along soft sands the next.

The Gargano Promontory in northern Puglia, home to a national park, is a particularly interesting setting for beaches, and is a paradise of nature and food. If Puglia is the "heel" to Italy's "boot," then Gargano is the "spur," projecting slightly into the Adriatic Sea. Its majestic, milky-white bluffs jut out above the sea, and its hill towns (Vieste and Vico del Gargano being two of the more notable) rest among a green, rolling landscape. *Trabucchi*—historic, spider-like wooden platform structures suspended over the sea with contraptions used for net fishing—pepper the coast, and many have been converted into rustic, open-air restaurants. While the sea's gentle, saline breezes caress your face, enjoy some of Italy's best *linguine ai ricci* (linguini with sea urchin), and let the urchins' buttery flavors work their magic. Or perhaps try a plate of classic *spaghetti alle vongole*, fresh parsley and clams delivering a freshness that perfectly complements the delicate, subtle, fruity flavor of Puglia's extra-virgin olive oil.



The Gargano coast

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Apulian Trabucco

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Gargano is also home to Manfredonia, a town built near the ruins of the ancient Greek and Roman city of Sipontum, that is filled with history and, naturally, more beaches with crystal clear waters. Looking for a more resort feel? Within Gargano's national park, Mattinata is a town whose hidden sea grottos will surely enchant you.

Down the Adriatic coast are port towns that seem as though they've been plucked straight from a *La Dolce Vita* fantasy. In Trani, the villa comunale (public garden), with its ornate sculpture and greenery, offers an almost surreal view of the vast expanse of the Adriatic. Nearby, a treasure of Romanesque architecture, the Trani Cathedral (La Cattedrale di San Nicola Pellegrino) has an almost pink hue created from its construction of local calcareous tuff stone. Polignano a Mare offers a year-round Amalfi coast feel that's more authentic. Panoramic views of the sea and idyllic old bridges beguile, but it's in enjoying a creamy, delectably sweet gelato and local chatter while sitting in the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele that will make you feel you're living life as an Italian.



Trani Cathedral



Polignano a Mare



Polignano a Mare historic center



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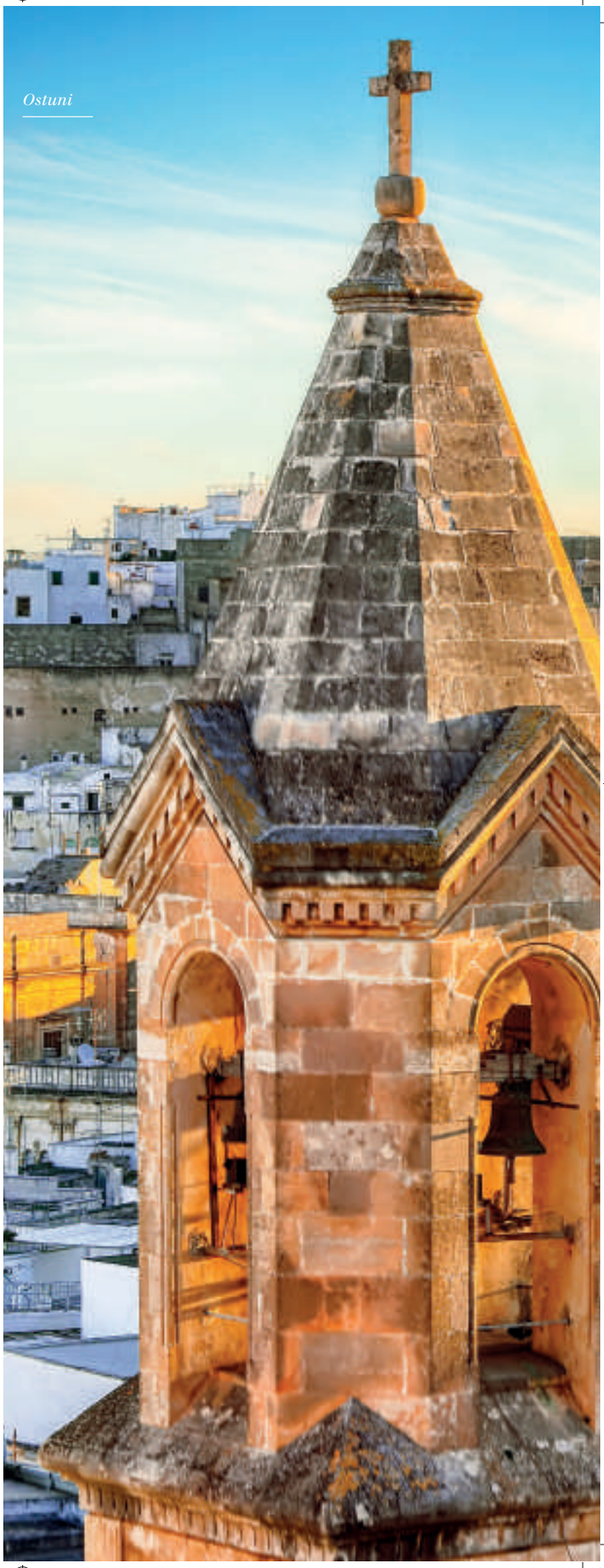
Alberobello



Ostuni

Moving inland, Alberobello is one of Italy's hidden gems. A UNESCO World Heritage site, it's dotted with bright, whitewashed *trulli*, classic, Apulian houses of dry-stone (built without mortar) with conical stone roofs. Alberobello's *trulli*, some dating to the fourteenth century, are especially pure white—when the sun is shining brightly on a clear day, the light reflects off the sides, creating a glimmering city as you walk throughout its winding, stone streets. You'll see plenty of locals, many of whom are selling souvenirs or wares to tourists, for this town isn't just a place to visit. Alberobello has many residents, and you'll be able to feel you're a part of the city's culture as people-watching locals offer a salutary "Ciao" as you pass by.

Another gleaming city is Ostuni. Known as La Città Bianca ("the white city"), it's home to a cathedral combining Romanesque and Gothic-style architecture and has a history of destruction (during the Brindisi earthquake of 1456) and reconstruction. While strolling Ostuni's streets and gazing at the shining alabaster city, you'd be remiss not to stop at a local osteria to eat *panzerotti*. A traditional Apulian dish, *panzerotti* (also known as *frittelle* or *fritte*) are savory turnovers, usually filled with tomato and mozzarella, that are fried to a perfect crisp. The contrast between the crunchy, flaky outside and the chewy, fluffy, inside—combined with the classic Italian flavors of tomato and mozzarella—will tempt anyone to go for a seconds or even thirds.

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Basilica di Santa Croce, Lecce

Lecce (the capital of the region) is nicknamed "The Florence of the South" for good reason. The city is filled with awe-inspiring Baroque architecture. The Basilica di Santa Croce, for example, is especially intricate—an extremely ornate façade, seventeen altars, a wooden caisson ceiling, and a large rose window that, when light passes through it, creates an ethereal atmosphere.

It's not just the coasts and cities of Puglia that contain the region's gems. Head into the countryside, where you'll find Apulian *masserie*, which are traditional farmhouses and farm estates. Many have been converted into luxurious hotels or private villas, where you can experience a more secluded, homey feel for your visit. You'll also find Castel del Monte ("Castle of the Mountain)—an octagonal citadel built in the 1240s by Emperor Frederick II. A UNESCO World Heritage site, it is an imposing and unique example of medieval military architecture.

From Alberobello to Manfredonia, from *linguine ai ricci* to *panzerotti*, from *trulli* to *trabucchi*, Puglia has incredible experiences and flavors to offer. Just as a boot can't exist without a heel, you can't fully experience what Italy is without a visit to Puglia.

By Lorenzo Manuali



Lecce

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A TASTE OF ITALIAN HISTORY.



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Panzerotti

Panzerotti are a common street food in southern and central Italy. They differ from calzone in that they are smaller and usually deep-fried, making them a perfect portable snack for an evening stroll through the piazza. While I've kept the filling savory here, you could also make a sweet version filled with ricotta and jam and dusted with confectioner's sugar while still hot. If you're short on time, you can also make these with purchased pizza dough.

Yield

Makes about 10

Ingredients for the dough

2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for working the dough
1 ½ teaspoons instant yeast
1 ½ teaspoons kosher salt
2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more for the bowl

Ingredients for the filling

½ teaspoon dried oregano, preferably Sicilian oregano on the branch
Peperoncino
½ cup marinara sauce
4 ounces fresh mozzarella, diced
1 ounce diced prosciutto cotto
¼ cup freshly grated Grana Padano
¼ cup fresh basil leaves, chopped

Vegetable oil, for frying
Warm marinara, for serving

Recipe

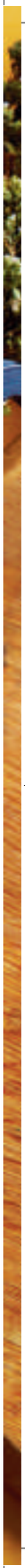
For the dough, combine the flour, yeast, and salt in the bowl of a mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Combine the olive oil and ¾ cup cold water in a spouted measuring cup. Pour the water mixture into the flour. Mix on low speed until combined. Switch to the paddle attachment and knead on medium-high speed until the dough forms a ball and is smooth and springy, 5 to 6 minutes.

Scrape the dough onto a floured surface and knead until the dough comes together in a smooth ball. Coat a large bowl with olive oil and add the dough ball. Cover and let rise at room temperature until doubled in size, about 1 hour.

While the dough rises, make the filling. Stir the oregano and a pinch of peperoncino into the marinara sauce in a medium bowl. Stir in the prosciutto, mozzarella, Grana Padano and basil.

Once the dough has risen, punch the dough down. On a floured work surface, roll the dough about ¼ inch thick. Use a 4 ½-inch cutter to cut the dough into rounds. Divide the filling among the rounds. Press with your fingers to seal. Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet and let rise while the oil for frying heats.

Preheat 3 inches of vegetable oil in a large Dutch oven to 350 degrees F. Add half of the panzerotti and fry, turning occasionally, until puffed and golden, about 5 minutes. Drain on a paper-towel-lined tray and serve warm, with more warm marinara.



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Spaghetti with Clams

SPAGHETTI ALLE VONGOLE

In Italy, you will find this dish made with small clams. Try to find small littlenecks, mahogany or Manila clams here. (Cockles would also work, but increase to 3 dozen). If you can only find larger littlenecks, you can remove them after they open, pluck the meat from the shells, and return to the sauce. Proceed with the recipe from there.

Yield

Serves 6

Ingredients

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
Kosher salt and peperoncino
½ cup dry white wine
2 dozen small littlenecks or other small clams
1 bunch scallions, chopped
1 pound spaghetti
¼ cup chopped fresh Italian parsley

Recipe

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil for pasta. Heat a large Dutch oven over medium high. Add the olive oil. When the oil is hot, add the garlic and cook until light golden and sizzling, about 30 seconds. Season lightly with salt and ¼ teaspoon peperoncino. Add the wine and bring to a simmer. Add the clams and scallions, stir, and cover the pot.

Meanwhile, cook the pasta. Once all of the clams have opened (discard any that do not open), increase the heat to reduce the sauce until slightly thickened, about 2 minutes.

When the pasta is al dente, remove with tongs directly to the sauce. Drizzle with a little more olive oil and sprinkle with the parsley. Toss to coat the pasta in the sauce, adding a little pasta water if it seems dry. Serve immediately.



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Braised Broccoli Rabe with Burrata

CIME DI RAPA BRASATE CON BURRATA

Serve this rustic appetizer family-style with grilled or toasted bread, rubbed with garlic. To trim broccoli rabe, I remove the tough ends, then, starting at the bottom of the stalk, I use a paring knife to strip away the tough outside, leaving the more tender inner stalk.

Yield

Serves 4 to 6 as an appetizer

Ingredients

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 large bunch broccoli rabe, trimmed (about 1 pound) and stems peeled
Kosher salt
Peperoncino
1 (8- to-10-ounce) burrata, at room temperature
Grilled bread, for serving

Recipe

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium. When the oil is hot, add the garlic and cook until sizzling, about 30 seconds. Add the broccoli rabe and turn to coat in the oil. Season with 1 teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon peperoncino. Add ¼ cup water and cover the skillet. Cook until the broccoli rabe has wilted and is tender, about 10 minutes. Uncover and increase the heat to evaporate the excess water.

Remove the broccoli rabe with tongs to a platter, leaving a space for the burrata. Add the burrata. Serve with the grilled bread.

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IT'S SUMMERTIME:

Grilled Swordfish Rollatini

At my home, the shady terrazza is where my family frequently gathers for warm-weather meals. We all love grilled seafood, a quick and easy choice that, paired with a salad, makes for a wonderfully light lunch or dinner. Tuna or swordfish steaks are regulars on my grill, served simply with grilled lemons or a salsa verde. But when I want something a little more layered in flavors, I make these fish into rollatini.

A traditional Sicilian dish, seafood rollatini (or involtini, as they are called in Sicily) consist of thinly sliced pieces of fish marinated in garlic oil and coated in herbed breadcrumbs, then rolled, grilled, and topped with salsa, such as this tomato version.

The best cut for making rollatini is the loin of the swordfish (or halibut or tuna, if you prefer). I buy one compact, evenly shaped loin and then mark off equal pieces (usually about 3 ounces each) before slicing crosswise across the loin, then flattening to about ¼-inch thickness using a meat mallet. If you're unable to find a loin, you can use pre-cut swordfish steaks, which you lie flat and cut like a cake into slices.

All of us who grill seafood have had that sinking feeling when fish sticks to the grill grates and flakes into the flames. My own little secret to combatting this, as well as giving the fish extra flavor, is that garlic oil marinade. I use it on almost all of my grilled seafood. Combined with a well-scraped, clean grill grate, your fish should cook easily and come off the grill smoothly.

You can eat the rollatini straight from the grill, but the longer you let them marinade in the accompanying sauce, the better they taste. It's worth the wait!

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Grilled Swordfish Rollatini

INVOLTINI DI PESCE SPADA ALLA GRIGLIA

You could make these rollatini with another type of firm fish if you like—tuna loin is another good choice. You could also use fillets of a flat fish, such as sole. They're much more fragile, so just top with the filling and roll as is. A more delicate fish could be baked in the oven if you're afraid of it sticking on the grill.

Yield

Serves 4

Ingredients for the swordfish

1 (1 ½-pound piece) skinless swordfish
¾ cup dried bread crumbs
1 scallion, chopped
2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
2 tablespoons toasted pine nuts, chopped
1 teaspoon freshly grated lemon zest
1 small garlic clove, finely chopped
Kosher salt
Peperoncino
6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for brushing

Ingredients for the salsa

4 ripe plum tomatoes, seeded and diced
½ small red onion, finely chopped
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
Kosher salt
Peperoncino
2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

Recipe

Slice the swordfish into 8 thin slices (or have your fishmonger do this for you). Cover with plastic wrap and pound gently with a meat mallet to even out the slices. Combine the bread crumbs, scallion, parsley, pine nuts, lemon zest, and garlic in a small bowl. Season with ½ teaspoon salt and a pinch of peperoncino. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons olive oil and toss to combine.

Lay the fish slices out on your work surface. Season lightly with salt. Sprinkle about a tablespoon of crumbs on each piece, reserving the remaining crumbs. Roll up and secure each one closed with a toothpick or two. Put in a baking dish and drizzle with the remaining ¼ cup olive oil. Turn the rollatini to coat all sides in the oil.

Preheat a grill or grill pan to medium. Spread the remaining crumbs on a plate. Roll the rollatini in the crumbs, pressing to adhere. Brush the grill with oil. Grill the rollatini, turning on all sides, until the crumbs have crisped and the swordfish is just cooked through, about 7 minutes in all. Remove to a clean baking dish.

For the salsa, combine the tomatoes, red onion, olive oil, and vinegar in a medium bowl. Season with salt and a pinch of peperoncino. Toss well. Sprinkle with the parsley and toss again. Serve the salsa spooned over the warm rollatini or spoon the salsa over and let the rollatini marinate for an hour (or more, if refrigerated).

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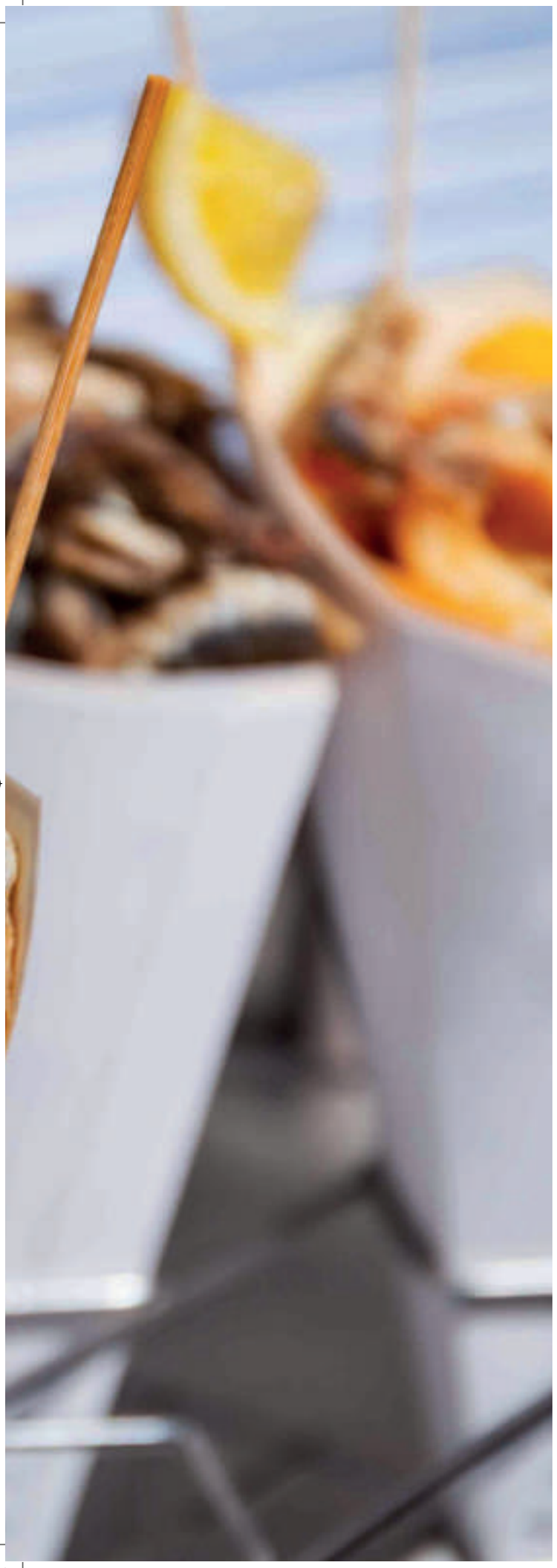

TIME TO EAT:

Italian Street Food

Some of the best eating I've done around the world has been when I have stopped to grab a quick bite at a street vendor's food cart or a stall in the square or market. Italians have mastered the art of street food, from Milan to Siracusa, Sicily, and these delicious grab-and-go snacks often tell the special story of exactly where they're made. From Naples I have enjoyed a paper cone filled with crisp deep-fried seafood, a *cuoppo napoletano*; around the country there are countless variations of *spiedini* (Italian kebabs) and the little round rice croquettes known as arancini. I especially love some of the more "adventurous" street foods, like Florence's *lampredotto*, cow stomach prepared in an herbed tomato broth and often served on a bun as a *panino con lampredotto*, or Palermo's *pani ca meusa*, a sandwich of tender veal spleen and caciocavallo cheese. They are absolutely delicious and can be a meal in themselves.

A special pleasure of Italy's summer and fall are various cities' individual *notte bianca* ("white nights", or sleepless nights), celebrations when shops and museums stay open all night, and cultural events and amazing street food is served up around the clock. In Florence, it happens on the last day of April, and in Rome it is usually in September.

Even when I can't travel, I enjoy recreating street food snacks at home. Among my favorites are the ones I'm sharing with you here: Sicilian panelle, chickpea fritters served piping hot in a panino; grilled lamb spiedini; and a gelato made with preserved strawberries in syrup. If you close your eyes when you take a bite, you just might find yourself, if only for a moment, in a Palermo piazza.

LIDIA'S ITALY AT HOME.indd 79 02/07/21 18:36

Panelle Sandwiches

PANINI CON PANELLE

Panelle are a Sicilian chickpea fritter and are a common street food, especially in Palermo. While they're delicious as is, they're also great as a hearty sandwich filling with ricotta and pecorino. For bite-sized appetizers, cut the fritters smaller before frying and use them as a base, then top with cheese, caponata, or seafood.

Yield

Makes 6 sandwiches

Ingredients

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for brushing the pan
Kosher salt
1 cup chickpea flour
Vegetable oil, for frying
6 semolina rolls, split
1 ½ cups fresh whole-milk ricotta
¼ cup grated pecorino
Freshly ground black pepper

Recipe

Brush a rimmed baking sheet with olive oil. In a small saucepan, combine 2 cups water, the olive oil, and 1 teaspoon kosher salt. Set over low heat and gradually whisk in the chickpea flour until smooth. Bring to a gentle simmer (just a few bubbles to the surface here and there) and cook until the mixture is thick and pulls away from the sides of the pan, similar to polenta, about 10 minutes. Spread into an even layer about ½-inch thick in the oiled pan, trying to keep in a rectangle shape. Let cool until firm, about 1 hour.

Heat about ½ inch vegetable oil in a large skillet over medium and line a baking sheet with paper towels. Preheat the oven to the lowest setting. Unmold the panelle mixture and cut into 2-inch triangles or squares. Dip a corner of one piece in the hot oil. If it sizzles on contact, the oil is ready. Add about half of the panelle and fry, turning once, until crisp and golden, about 2 minutes per side. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on the paper-towel-lined baking sheet and season with salt. Keep warm in the oven while you fry the second batch.

Divide the hot panelle among the rolls. Top with the ricotta and pecorino and finish with a generous grinding of pepper. Serve immediately.



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MARCHIO STORICO

Grilled Lamb Skewers

SPIEDINI DI AGNELLO

These lamb skewers from Abruzzo are the essence of simplicity—lamb, garlic, rosemary, olive oil, and peperoncino. If you have a charcoal grill, this is the time to use it—the smoke kisses the lamb and adds great flavor. Lamb shoulder is the best cut to use here. Leave some of the fat on to keep the lamb moist.

Yield

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

2 pounds boneless lamb shoulder, with a thin layer of fat, cut into ¾-inch cubes
8 cloves garlic, crushed and peeled
2 sprigs fresh rosemary, leaves removed and coarsely chopped
½ teaspoon peperoncino
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for brushing
Kosher salt
1 long loaf Italian bread, sliced

Recipe

Combine the lamb, garlic, rosemary, peperoncino, and olive oil in a large resealable plastic bag. Let marinate at least 8 hours or overnight.

When you are ready to cook, soak 8 wooden skewers in water for 30 minutes. Preheat an outdoor grill, preferably, charcoal, to medium.

Drain the skewers and thread the meat onto the skewers. Season all over with salt.

Grill the skewers, turning occasionally, until the meat is charred all over and cooked through, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove to a platter and let rest for a few minutes.

While the lamb rests, grill the bread, turning once, until crisp and golden on the edges. Brush the bread lightly with olive oil. Serve the lamb skewers with the grilled bread to soak up the juices.



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Strawberry Gelato

GELATO ALLA FRAGOLA

Fabbri makes wild strawberries preserved in syrup that bring the flavors of a ripe, sweet berry to your table year round. I love this version of gelato—it's so easy and requires no cooking.

Yield

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

2 cups chilled heavy cream
1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
½ cup chopped strawberries in syrup, such as Fabbri, plus 3 tablespoons syrup from the jar, plus more for serving
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
¼ teaspoon almond extract

Recipe

Whisk the cream and sweetened condensed milk in a large bowl until light and foamy. Transfer to an ice cream machine and churn according to manufacturers' instructions. When the gelato is almost done, add the strawberries, syrup, vanilla, and almond extract through the feed tube. Churn 5 minutes more, until very thick.

Pack into a lidded container and freeze until firm, at least 4 hours. Scoop into bowls to serve, topping with more strawberries and syrup.

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TIE ONE ON:

Fruit Cocktails

My family and I have enjoyed wonderful times together vacationing in the Caribbean. In the evenings, after we've spent the days swimming and exploring, we often gather on the terrace to share a cocktail. Being the islands, it's usually a refreshing fruit-forward drink, which I especially love.

When I return home, I usually bring some Caribbean rum back with me, so I can recreate those delicious cocktails and be reminded of the gentle island breezes and of those happy times together. One of my favorites, an island classic, is a rum punch, made with both light and dark rum, grenadine, and a combination of orange, lime, and pineapple juices. (The rum punch was actually invented in India but brought to the Caribbean with British sailors in the 1600s, who drank it in place of the beer and wine they couldn't get so far from home.) It's nice to serve a punch in a beautiful punch bowl when you're having a party, and it saves you from making individual cocktails.

A spritz is another light cocktail that is just right for a summer brunch or lunch. Being a grapefruit lover, I make a spritz with grapefruit juice, whose crisp flavor complements the slightly sweet flavor of vermouth and gets fizz from grapefruit seltzer. A garnish of pink grapefruit slices and a sprig of rosemary adds a pretty touch and a lovely herbal aroma.

We Italians also have our signature fruity cocktails, and the sgroppino is a summer staple. It's a slushy, dessert-like drink created in Venice and typically made with Prosecco, vodka, and lemon sorbet. I sometimes substitute limoncello for the vodka, or grappa when I'm in Friuli. But when peaches are in season, I can't resist making these lush fruits the star of my sgroppino, mixing peach sorbet and peach vodka with a Prosecco rosé and garnishing it with fresh fruit slices and aromatic basil. Pink and pretty, this sgroppino tastes of summer at its sweetest.

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Rum Punch

My family and I have had many wonderful vacations in the Carribean and this recipe takes me back there. It can easily be doubled or tripled to serve a crowd.

Yield

Serves 4

Ingredients

2 cups freshly squeezed orange juice
2 cups pineapple juice
¼ cup freshly squeezed lime juice
½ cup light rum
½ cup dark rum
¼ cup grenadine
8 dashes Angostura bitters
Ice cubes
Pineapple wedges and good-quality maraschino cherries, for garnish

Recipe

Combine the orange juice, pineapple juice, lime juice, rums, grenadine, and bitters in a serving pitcher. Stir and chill until cold, at least 2 hours. Serve in glasses filled with ice and garnished with pineapple wedges and maraschino cherries.



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Grapefruit–Vermouth Spritz

SPRITZ AL POMPELMO

This pale pink, relatively low-alcohol drink is crisp and refreshing, making it perfect for a brunch or a summer outdoor "girls' night" gathering. I like to use a dry Italian vermouth here. Vermouth will keep in your pantry for quite a while (longer than an opened bottle of wine) and can be used to deglaze skillets in the same way you'd use white wine.

Yield

Makes 2 cocktails

Ingredients

4 ounces dry vermouth
4 ounces pink grapefruit juice
Ice cubes
8 ounces chilled grapefruit seltzer
Pink grapefruit slices and rosemary sprigs, for garnish

Recipe

Divide the vermouth and grapefruit juice between two wine glasses. Fill the glasses with ice. Top with the seltzer. Stir each with a rosemary sprig. Add the sprig and a grapefruit slice to each glass and serve.



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Peach-Basil Sgroppino

SGROPPINO DI PESCHE E BASILICO

The sgroppino is a slushy Italian dessert cocktail and is usually made with lemon sorbet and plain vodka. It's perfect for hotter weather and I find the addition of peaches and basil make it even more summery.

Yield

Makes 2 cocktails

Ingredients

1 cup peach sorbet
8 ounces Prosecco rosé
2 ounces peach vodka
Peach slices and basil sprigs, for garnish

Recipe

Chill 2 champagne flutes in the freezer for 15 minutes. Combine the sorbet, Prosecco, and vodka in a spouted measuring cup. Stir until slushy. Pour into the chilled flutes, garnish with peaches and basil, and serve immediately.



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WHAT A WONDERFUL PASTA:

Garden Fresh

When markets and gardens are brimming with vegetables at their peak, it's time to pair your pastas (either warm or in cool salads) with this fresh produce. There's nothing like the intense flavor you'll get from a pasta dish with ripe plum tomato, an eggplant or bell pepper right off the vine, or an anise-scented bulb of fennel.

On hot days I want to keep things simple, so I prepare a tomato sauce that requires no cooking at all. From my garden, I pick tomatoes that are sun-kissed and juicy, and marinate them with olive oil, garlic, and peperoncino. What develops in that hour of marinating is a delicious raw sauce I serve over campanelle, the beautiful bell-shaped pasta that offers chunky tomato sauce places to curl up in.

With my eggplant, I do a summer twist on the ricotta-rich pasta alla Norma. Instead of baking it as usual, I prepare it entirely in a skillet on the stovetop. This Sicilian specialty is every bit as satisfying as the baked dish. It's easy to see what that long-ago Italian writer meant when he exclaimed upon tasting it, "that's a real *Norma*" (likening it to the magnificent Bellini opera of that name).

I also like to keep things interesting in my pasta salads, using a variety of pastas and ingredients. For a salad that can easily be a meal in itself, I combine peppers, olives, mortadella, and provolone with fregola, a nutty little semolina-based pasta that looks like Israeli couscous and hails from Sardinia. Topped with crunchy pistachios, this salad has it all. (Remember fregola when you're making soups and stews and any dish that calls for a tiny pasta.)

Even in summer I can't resist baking macaroni and cheese; it's a family favorite. Mixing fontina, Grana Padano, and provolone, and classic cheddar creates multiple layers of cheesy flavor, along with the bonus of salty prosciutto cotto and tender peas. Adding fresh herbs (sage and parsley) gives this rich dish a bright note. For the pasta, curly cavatappi's corkscrew shape is ideal for catching and holding all of that creamy sauce.

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Campanelle with Raw Heirloom Tomato Sauce

CAMPANELLE CON SALSA DI POMODORO CRUDO

This is a very simple version of this sauce—it highlights the flavor of tomatoes when they are at their peak. You can add cubes of fresh mozzarella or leftover chicken or shellfish to make it a bit more substantial.

Yield

Serves 6

Ingredients

2 pounds ripe heirloom tomatoes, various colors and sizes
1 garlic clove, crushed and peeled
Kosher salt
Peperoncino
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 pound campanelle
½ cup grated Grana Padano
½ cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves

Recipe

Core the tomatoes and cut into 1-inch chunks. Scrape the tomatoes from the cutting board into a large serving bowl, scraping any juices on the board in as well. Crush the garlic clove on the cutting board with the side of your knife. Sprinkle with salt and finely chop. Use the side of your knife to work the garlic into a smooth paste. Scrape into the bowl with the tomatoes. Season with 1 teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon peperoncino. Drizzle with the olive oil and toss well. Let sit at room temperature for 1 hour.

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil for pasta. Cook the pasta until al dente. Remove the pasta with a spider directly to the serving bowl. Toss to coat in the sauce, adding a little pasta water, if needed, to moisten. Sprinkle with the grated cheese. Tear the basil leaves over the pasta. Toss and serve immediately.



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Rigatoni alla Norma

This classic sauce is ideally made with the smaller Italian variety of eggplant which are at their best at the end of summer. They have fewer seeds and tend to be less bitter.

Yield

Serve 6

Ingredients

Kosher salt
Vegetable oil, for frying
2 pounds Italian eggplant, cut into 1-inch cubes
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 (28-ounce) can whole San Marzano tomatoes, crushed by hand
¼ teaspoon peperoncino
1 pound rigatoni
1 cup fresh basil leaves, chopped
½ cup freshly grated Grana Padano
1 cup fresh ricotta

Recipe

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil for the pasta. Heat a large nonstick skillet over medium high. Add enough vegetable oil to film the bottom of the pan. Add half of the eggplant and season with salt. Cook, tossing occasionally, until browned and almost tender, 6 to 7 minutes. Repeat with the remaining eggplant. Carefully pour the oil out of the skillet and wipe it clean with a paper towel.

Return the skillet to medium heat. Add the olive oil. When the oil is hot, add the garlic and cook until lightly golden, about 4 minutes. Add the tomatoes, red pepper flakes, and 1 cup water. Season with salt. Bring to a simmer and cook until slightly thickened, about 10 minutes, adding the eggplant cubes in the last 5 minutes.

While the sauce simmers, cook the pasta until al dente. When the sauce and pasta are cooked, remove the pasta with a spider directly to the sauce and add the basil leaves. Drizzle with a little olive oil and toss to coat the pasta in the sauce, adding a little of the pasta water if it seems dry.

Off the heat, sprinkle with the grated cheese and toss to combine. Dollop the ricotta on top to warm it through and serve immediately.

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Fregola Salad

INSALATA DI FREGOLA

Fregola, tiny round pasta shapes pasta made from semolina, is hearty and chewy like a grain but cooks quickly. This hearty pasta salad is best when made a bit ahead to let the flavors mingle. Fregola is very versatile. In addition to this preparation, I also like it cooked risotto-style with seafood.

Yield

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 cups fregola
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more as needed
3 tablespoons red-wine vinegar, plus more as needed
6 ounces young provolone, diced
6 ounces mortadella, diced
1 cup diced yellow or orange bell pepper
2 stalks celery, chopped
½ medium red onion, finely chopped
⅓ cup pitted black Italian olives, slivered
⅓ cup toasted pistachios, coarsely chopped
6 cups baby arugula

Recipe

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil. Add the fregola and cook until al dente, about 10 to 12 minutes. Rinse and drain. Let cool for about 10 minutes in the colander.

While the fregola is still warm, but not hot, add to a large serving bowl. Drizzle with the oil and vinegar and toss. Add the provolone, mortadella, peppers, celery, red onion and olives. Toss well. Let sit at room temperature for 1 hour (or in the refrigerator for longer) to let the flavors mingle. (If you refrigerate, let come to room temperature before serving.)

To serve, add the pistachios and toss. If the salad seems dry, drizzle with a bit more oil and vinegar and toss again. Spread the arugula on a serving platter. Mound the fregola on top and serve.



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Macaroni and Cheese

PASTA AL FORNO

Macaroni-and-cheese is an iconic American dish. This version is just as comforting as the classic, but with an Italian twist, using fontina, provolone, sage, and prosciutto cotto. Prosciutto cotto is Italian "cooked ham," versus a dry-aged ham, like traditional prosciutto. It's milder in flavor and often less expensive, making it the perfect addition here where aged prosciutto or another salumi would overwhelm the dish.

Yield

Serves 8

Ingredients

5 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus more for the baking dish
1 pound cavatappi
1 cup frozen peas
3 cups whole milk
1 cup heavy cream
8 large fresh sage leaves
¼ cup panko
¼ cup grated Grana Padano
2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 ounces prosciutto cotto, chopped
2 garlic cloves, chopped
¼ cup all purpose flour
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 cups grated Italian fontina (about 8 ounces)
1 cup grated provolone (about 4 ounces)
1 cup grated white cheddar (about 4 ounces)

Recipe

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Butter an 8-by-13-inch baking dish. Bring a large pot of salted water to boil for the pasta. Once the water is boiling, cook the pasta until al dente, adding the peas in the last 5 minutes. Drain and set aside, reserving the pot.

Combine the milk, cream and sage in a medium saucepan. Bring to a simmer over very low heat while you make the sauce.

Heat a small skillet over medium-low heat. Add 1 tablespoon of the butter. Once the butter is melted, add the panko, Cook and stir until lightly toasted, about 4 minutes. Set aside and let cool. Stir in the grated Grana Padano and parsley. Season with salt and pepper.

Heat the large pot over medium. Add the remaining 4 tablespoons butter and melt. Add the ham and garlic and cook until the ham is sizzling, about 1 minute. Sprinkle with the flour and stir until smooth. Cook 1 minute to toast the flour, then whisk in the milk mixture until smooth. Bring to a simmer and cook until thickened, about 4 minutes. Season with 1 teaspoon salt and several grinds of pepper. Over low heat, stir in the fontina, provolone, and cheddar, a handful at a time, until melted. Add the cooked pasta and peas and stir to coat the pasta in the sauce. Transfer to the buttered baking dish and top with the panko mixture. Bake until the top is crisp and golden and the edges are bubbly, about 30 minutes.

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MY GROCERY LIST:

Time Savers

Just because it's balmy outdoors doesn't mean you can't have delicious warm foods for your summer lunches and dinners. It's just a matter of cutting down (or cutting out) oven time with dishes that can just as easily be prepared on the stovetop. And, as much as I'm a champion of doing as much of the preparation myself, buying some ingredients canned, jarred, or pre-mixed can cut down on cooking time and give you more time to enjoy yourself in that beautiful weather around the table with your friends and family. These items are often on my grocery list.

A good example of dishes that include these time savers is this crowd-pleasing menu of spicy spins on picnic favorites. For a twist on burgers, I like to make individual meatloaves (*polpettone*) served with marinara sauce. The time saver is to buy a mix of beef, pork, and veal already ground by the butcher instead of grinding and mixing it myself. This classic mixture has great depth of flavor and is extra moist.

Another picnic classic is potato salad, which I make spicy with pickled hot cherry peppers and add pancetta or slab bacon for a salty, meaty bite. I keep my pantry stocked with jars of the hot peppers, which contribute to so many dishes that need a touch of heat. Like a German potato salad, this Italian version is served warm.

Any barbecue worth its salt has a big casserole dish of baked beans on the table. No need to turn the oven on for my recipe, which is tangy with balsamic vinegar and tomato paste, with honey for balance, and, like the meatloaf, made completely on the stovetop. On my summer grocery lists you'll find canned cannellini beans, which are so nice to have at the ready for these baked beans and all sorts of summer salads. Put them on your list, too; you'll be happy you did!

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Skillet Meatloaves

POLPETTONE COTTO IN PADELLA

These prepared-on-the-stovetop loaves are like a cross between meatballs and meatloaf . . . and what could be wrong with that? Serve with olive-oil mashed potatoes, polenta, or just some crusty bread for dipping. Leftovers make a great meatloaf parm sandwich.

Yield

Serves 4

Ingredients

½ cup bread crumbs
⅓ cup milk
1 ½ pounds meatloaf mix (beef/pork/veal)
1 large egg, beaten
½ cup finely chopped red bell pepper
½ cup grated zucchini
¾ cup grated Grana Padano, plus more for serving
3 scallions, finely chopped
6 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
3 cups prepared marinara sauce
1 cup grated provolone

Recipe

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Combine the bread crumbs and milk in a large mixing bowl and let sit 5 minutes to rehydrate. Add the meatloaf mix, egg, bell pepper, zucchini, ½ cup Grana Padano, the scallions, ¼ cup parsley, and the garlic, Season with 1 ½ teaspoons salt and a generous grinding of black pepper. Form into 4 (4-inch long) oval meatloaves.

Heat a large cast-iron or ovenproof nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add the olive oil. When the oil is hot, add the meatloaves and brown all over, about 3 minutes per side. Pour in the marinara. Cover and bake until bubbling, about 15 minutes. Uncover, sprinkle with the provolone and the remaining ¼ cup grated cheese, and bake until the meatloaves are crusty and cooked through, about 20 to 25 minutes more. Sprinkle with the remaining 2 tablespoons parsley and a dusting of grated cheese and serve.



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Spicy Potato Salad

INSALATA DI PATATE PICCANTE

Potato salad is a summer staple and this one is light yet hearty. Serve a scoop on a bed of greens for a light lunch or serve alongside grilled chicken or pork at dinner. You can make this salad a day ahead, but let it come back to room temperature before serving.

Yield

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

2 pounds baby potatoes, halved crosswise
Kosher salt
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
4 ounces slab bacon, diced
3 hot pickled cherry peppers, seeded and slivered, plus 3 tablespoons brine from the jar, plus more as needed
3 stalks celery, chopped, plus ½ cup inner celery leaves
3 scallions, chopped
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley or dill

Recipe

Put the potatoes in a large saucepan with salted water to cover by about 2 inches. Bring to a boil, adjust the heat to simmer, and cook until tender, about l0 minutes. Drain, let cool for a few minutes in the colander and transfer to a serving bowl.

Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add the bacon and cook until just crisp, about 5 minutes. Drain on paper towels. To the skillet, add the cherry peppers and cook until sizzling. Stir in the brine. Pour the warm dressing over the still warm potatoes in the serving bowl. Add the celery and scallions and season with salt. Toss well. Taste and add a little more brine, if needed. Add the celery leaves and parsley or dill, toss again, and serve warm (or at room temperature).



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Italian "Baked" Beans

FAGIOLI IN PENTOLA

This quick version of baked beans is done with canned beans cooked on top of the stove. My additions of sage and balsamic vinegar give it a slightly Italian twist, but keep the classic savory/sweet flavors we all love in baked beans. You can easily double this for a larger summer picnic gathering.

Yield

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 medium onion, finely chopped
2 ounces diced prosciutto cotto
10 fresh sage leaves
3 tablespoons tomato paste
2 cans cannellini beans, rinsed and drained
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
2 tablespoons honey
Kosher salt
Peperoncino

Recipe

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium. Add the onion and cook until wilted, about 5 minutes. Add the prosciutto cotto and sage leaves and cook until sizzling, about 1 minute. Make a space in the center of the pan for the tomato paste. Stir and toast the tomato paste in that spot for a minute, then add the beans. Stir to coat the beans in the tomato paste. Add 2 cups water, the vinegar, and honey. Season with 1 teaspoon salt and a pinch of peperoncino. Simmer over medium heat until the sauce has thickened and coats the beans, about 15 minutes. Serve hot.



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LIDIA'S ITALY AT HOME.indd 108 02/07/21 18:37



EAT DIFFERENT:

Flavor Booster

When we have beautiful ingredients to cook with, we owe it to them to bring out as much of their flavor as possible. It might be a period of marinating them or combining them with certain other complementary ingredients or even a special cooking technique. Here are a few that I have come to rely on.

The first technique is combining cooked and raw vegetables in a salad (*insalata cotta e cruda*). Roasting or grilling onions, potatoes or peppers, for example, rounds out and sweetens their flavor and creates a beautiful blend of textures with raw, more crisp vegetables like tomatoes. I enjoyed these salads while visiting the markets and friends' homes in Palermo, Sicily, and they inspired me to get into the raw/cooked-salad habit when I came home.

Marinating vegetables in a sweet-sour scapece of wine-vinegar, sugar, olive oil, garlic, salt, and peperoncino is another tried-and-true flavor enhancer. With *scapece*, you typically marinate after frying the vegetables, but in the case of zucchini, which are so tender when sliced thin, I sometimes marinate before serving them raw. *Scapece* is an ancient method of preserving foods, and now simply helps brighten your ingredients. If you make the Neapolitan zucchini recipe that follows, you'll taste that brightness yourself.

Weighting down meats like chicken or quail when they are being cooked helps to crisp the skin more quickly and evenly while keeping the meat itself extra juicy and flavorful. I split chicken breasts (or legs or thighs), flatten them and place them skin-side down in a cast-iron skillet and weight them with a foil-wrapped brick while cooking. You need something very heavy, and while a brick is ideal (as cooks throughout Italy have done for centuries), you can use a second cast-iron pan as an alternative. At our family's restaurants, bricked chicken is one of our guests' favorite dishes; it may become one of yours as well.

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Raw and Cooked Salad

INSALATA COTTA E CRUDA

This is a version of a salad I had in Sicily at a friend's house. The original is a combination of boiled, roasted, and raw vegetables. We set this one up for summer by doing it on the grill.

Grilling vegetables caramelizes them and brings out their sweetness. Cut no more than ½-inch thick so that they will cook completely before they get too dark. Softer vegetables like zucchini, onions, and peppers can go straight onto the hot grill. More firm vegetables like potatoes or other root vegetables should be parboiled first or started in a foil pack to steam them, as we do here. If you're grilling outside, keep one side of the grill on low and one on medium or high, so you can move the vegetables around as needed, to keep them from burning before they're fully cooked.

Yield

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

1 pound red potatoes, cut into 1-inch wedges
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 large red onion, cut crosswise into ½-inch rings
1 yellow bell pepper, sides cut off into 4 planks
1 orange bell pepper, sides cut off into 4 planks
1 medium Italian eggplant, cut crosswise into ½-inch slices
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
½ cup pitted oil-cured olives, halved
3 tablespoons drained capers
2 ripe tomatoes, cut into wedges
1 large head red-leaf lettuce, torn into bite sized pieces, washed and spun dry

Recipe

Preheat an outdoor grill with one side on low and one on medium high. Mound the potatoes on a 18-by-18-inch double thickness of aluminum foil and drizzle with 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. Season with salt and pepper and toss. Spread the potatoes in a layer 2 or 3 potatoes deep. Fold the foil over to make a package and enclose the potatoes. Place on the hotter side of the grill and cook, turning the package every 5 minutes, until potatoes are tender, about 20 minutes. Remove and open the package to let the potatoes cool slightly, about 10 minutes.

Spread out the onion rings, both bell peppers, and eggplant on a baking sheet. Brush generously with about 3 tablespoons of the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Add to the hot side of the grill, in batches if needed, and char on both sides, about 4 minutes per side. If the vegetables are charring too quickly, move to the cooler side of the grill to finish cooking. Remove all of the cooked vegetables to a clean cutting board to cool slightly, about 10 minutes. Separate the onions into rings, cut the peppers and eggplant into chunks or strips.

Scrape cooked vegetables into a serving bowl along with their juices. Drizzle with the remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil and the vinegar. Add the olives and capers and toss well. Taste and season with salt and pepper, if needed. Add the tomatoes and lettuce, toss once more, and serve.

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Zucchini in Scapece

ZUCCHINE ALLA SCAPECE

The method of "in scapece" is to fry vegetables (or proteins, especially fish and seafood) in oil, then add vinegar, herbs, and sometimes garlic. The warm, pan-fried food is then left to cool and marinate in a flavorful dressing. It's not quite a pickle as it's not as acidic, so it's a versatile side dish or antipasti that goes with just about anything. Here, I lighten the dish and skip the frying—making this lighter, brighter, and easier than the original.

I like scallions here, but you could leave them out or choose another member of the onion family. Fresh mint is traditional, but you could trade it out for another soft herb of your choice. This can be made several days ahead and will keep well in the refrigerator, though it tastes best at room temperature. Use as a side or antipasti or add to a salad or sandwich.

Yield

Serves about 4 to 6

Ingredients

4 medium zucchini (about 2 pounds)
1 bunch scallions, trimmed and cut into 2-inch pieces
¼ cup loosely packed fresh mint leaves
1 ½ cups white wine vinegar
1 tablespoon sugar
Kosher salt
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 garlic cloves, sliced
Peperoncino
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Recipe

Trim the ends from the zucchini. Thinly slice the zucchini lengthwise to about ¼-inch thickness (on a mandoline, if you have one). Put half of the zucchini in a glass or ceramic dish where they will fit snugly. Top with half of the scallions and half of the mint leaves. Repeat with the remaining zucchini, scallions, and mint.

Combine the vinegar, sugar, 1 teaspoon salt and ½ cup water in a small saucepan. Bring to a simmer and cook until reduced by about one quarter. Stir in the garlic and a pinch of peperoncino and pour over the sliced zucchini. Let cool to room temperature and let sit for at least 2 hours, longer if you have time.

When ready to serve, drain the zucchini. Place in a bowl and drizzle with the olive oil. Season with salt, toss and serve.

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Bricked Chicken

POLLO AL MATTONE

To prepare the chicken, remove the backbone with kitchen shears. Flip the chicken breast-side-down and cut out the breastbone (a thin, triangular piece of cartilage that connects the two breasts). Flip the chicken breast-side-up and press down firmly all over with the palms of your hands to flatten as much as possible. (You can also ask the butcher to do this all for you.)

This method of weighting the chicken produces juicy flesh and a crisp skin. You can also cook quail or Cornish hens in this manner—or even chicken thighs and legs. A cast-iron pan is essential here to develop the crust on the skin. I love my cast-iron pans for so many things—they are great for meat, potatoes, frittatas, anytime you want a crispy crust and moist interior. These pans hold heat well and evenly and you can get them quite hot without damaging them. Make sure to clean them properly—no scouring pads or harsh cleaners, and dry thoroughly after each use.

Yield

Serves 2 to 4

Ingredients

1 (3 ⅓-pound) chicken, rinsed and patted dry, prepared as in headnote
1 sprig rosemary, needles removed
2 cloves garlic, sliced
2 lemons, 1 halved, 1 cut into wedges
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Recipe

Position the chicken to fit snugly in a baking dish. Scatter the rosemary leaves and garlic slices over top. Squeeze the lemon halves over the chicken and drizzle with 3 tablespoons olive oil. Turn the chicken to coat in the marinade. Cover tightly and let marinate in the refrigerator at least 4 hours and up to overnight.

Preheat oven to 475 degrees F. Let the chicken come to room temperature. Remove from the marinade and scrape off any pieces of rosemary or garlic. Season the chicken liberally with salt and pepper.

Heat a large cast-iron skillet over medium high. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil. When the oil is hot, add the chicken, breast side down. Weight with a brick wrapped in foil or a second heavy cast-iron skillet and press down. Cook until the skin is very crisp and golden brown, about 5 minutes. Transfer to the oven and roast 10 minutes more. Remove the skillet and flip breast-side-up, removing the brick. Add the lemon wedges in the spaces in the pan. Continue to roast until the chicken reads 165 degrees F on an instant-read thermometer and the skin is deep golden and very crisp, about 20 minutes more. Let rest on a cutting board for 10 minutes. Cut the chicken into serving pieces and serve with the roasted lemon wedges.

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IT'S ALWAYS DESSERT TIME:

Summer Delights

My family is filled with dessert lovers, and we all have our summer favorites, a few of which I share with you on the following pages. There's a little something for everyone, from the fruit-dessert fan to the chocolate lover to the ice-cream enthusiast.

A wonderful dessert that brings out the best in the season's stone fruits is a peach-and-plum bread lasagna, which was one of my mother's favorites. You may not think of lasagna as a dessert, but I use "lasagna" here more as a technique of layering. Buttery, sugary slices of bread are layered with juicy fruit and crowned with a crumb topping. You'll never think of lasagna in the same way again! This summer we will make it in honor of Grandma.

Everybody in the family loves tiramisù, that frothy concoction of coffee, cookies, and whipped cream and mascarpone. It's an easy dessert to serve in summer when you may not feel like baking your own ladyfingers (*savoiardi*, in Italian) but can use store-bought cookies instead. I like the strong flavor of espresso in this dessert, along with chocolate-coffee liqueur to give it a sophisticated touch.

For me, the gelato and sorbet lover, a chilled, fruity semifreddo (semifreddo actually means "half cold") is the perfect treat to cool and refresh you. Just about any fruit you love works in a creamy semifreddo, which has a mousse-like texture. I make this recipe with lemon and fresh raspberries, spiked with the raspberry liqueur Chambord for a delicious grown-up version of a soft-ice-cream treat.

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Peach and Plum Bread Lasagna

LASAGNE DI PANE CON PESCHE E PRUGNE

This recipe is a favorite of mine and I have been making variations of it for years. Use whatever summer fruit is best at your farmers' market—peaches, plums, apricots. You can even throw in a few handfuls of berries. This is a great way to use up old bread, so don't get caught up in the size or number of slices in the recipe, just use that as a guideline. You just want enough bread to make 2 layers and you can cut or tear it to fit in the dish, if needed.

Yield

Serves 8

Ingredients for the fruit layer

1 ¼ pounds ripe peaches, sliced ¼-inch-thick (3 or 4 large)
1 ¼ pounds ripe plums, sliced ¼-inch thick (4 or 5 medium)
Zest and juice of 1 lemon
¾ cup sugar

Ingredients for the bread layer

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature, plus more for the baking dish
6 (½-inch-thick) slices day-old country bread (about 5-by-4 inches)
2 tablespoons sugar

Ingredients for the topping

¼ cup granulated sugar
¼ cup all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons light brown sugar
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground ginger
Kosher salt
4 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into pieces
¼ cup chopped walnuts

Whipped cream, for serving

Recipe

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. For the fruit layer, toss the peaches and plums in a large bowl with the lemon zest, juice, and sugar.

Butter an 8-by-10-inch baking dish. Melt 3 tablespoons butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add half of the bread slices. Brown and crisp on one side, turn and brown the second side, about 2 minutes per side. Remove to a plate. Repeat with the remaining butter and bread. While the bread is still hot, sprinkle the tops with the sugar.

For the topping, combine the granulated sugar, flour, brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and ½ teaspoon salt in a medium bowl. Scatter in the butter pieces and rub the butter into the flour mixture with your fingertips until the mixture resembles small cornflakes. Add the chopped walnuts and toss.

Layer half of the bread in the bottom of the baking dish, breaking the slices to fit, if needed. Spoon half of the fruit layer over top. Add second layer of bread slices and press down slightly. Top with the rest of the fruit and juices. Sprinkle the topping over all.

Set the baking dish on a sheet pan and bake on the middle rack of the oven until the juices are bubbling and the topping is golden brown, 50 minutes to 1 hour. Let cool at least 15 minutes before serving.

Serve warm, topped with whipped cream.

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Quick Tiramisù Cups

TIRAMISÙ

This is a speedy version of tiramisù with no cooking involved, perfect for those summer nights when you want something a little rich and decadent but you don't feel like standing over the stove. Use a good-quality espresso here, as its flavor is infused throughout.

Yield

Serves 4

Ingredients

1 cup heavy cream
1 cup mascarpone, at room temperature
¾ cup superfine sugar
1 ½ cups freshly brewed espresso, at room temperature
¼ cup coffee chocolate liqueur
20 savoiardi cookies (ladyfingers)
Shaved bittersweet chocolate, for garnish

Recipe

Whisk the heavy cream to soft peaks on high speed in a mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, about 1 minute. Remove to a bowl. Combine the mascarpone and ½ cup superfine sugar in the mixer bowl. Switch to the paddle attachment and beat on medium speed just until smooth and light, about 30 seconds. Fold in the whipped cream.

In a pie plate or small baking dish, combine the espresso, remaining ¼ cup superfine sugar and the liqueur, stirring to dissolve the sugar.

To assemble, divide about half of the mascarpone mixture among the bottoms of 4 glass serving dishes (or small mason jar). Dip half of the cookies in the espresso mixture just to wet them (you don't want them to be too soggy). Break the cookies to fit the dishes to make a layer. Top with another third of the mascarpone mixture. Soak and top with the rest of the cookies. Top with the final layer of mascarpone mixture, smoothing the top with a small offset spatula or spoon. Chill at least 2 hours or up to overnight.

Garnish with shaved chocolate right before serving.

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Lemon–Raspberry Semifreddo

SEMIFREDDO AL LIMONE E LAMPONI

Semifreddo translates to "half cold" or "half frozen," which is not technically true. This dessert freezes completely but retains its velvety mousse-like texture even when frozen. Just a few tablespoons of Chambord raspberry liqueur give this dessert a pretty pale pink color. If you don't have Chambord, you could use limoncello or even brandy, though the color will be slightly different.

Yield

Serves 8

Ingredients

6 large egg yolks
Zest of 1 lemon
½ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 ¼ cup sugar
1 cup raspberries
2 cups chilled heavy cream
2 tablespoons Chambord
or other raspberry liqueur

Fresh raspberries, for serving

Recipe

Line a standard 8 ½-by-4 ½-inch freezer-proof loaf pan with plastic wrap to overhang the edges by about 3 inches. Whisk the egg yolks, lemon zest and juice, and sugar in a large metal bowl. Set the bowl over a saucepan of simmering water and whisk constantly until the mixture is light and pillowy, 5 to 6 minutes. (It should read about 150 to 160 degrees F on an instant-read thermometer.) Transfer to an electric mixer and beat on high speed with the whisk attachment until thick and light and cooled. Set aside.

In a small bowl, mash the raspberries with a fork, leaving them slightly chunky. Whip the cream to soft peaks. Stir in the Chambord. Fold the raspberries and whipped cream into the yolk mixture, taking care not to deflate it. Transfer the mixture to the loaf pan. Tap the pan on the counter a few times to remove any air bubbles. Lightly cover with the plastic wrap. Freeze until completely firm, 6 hours or overnight.

To serve, dip a knife into a glass of hot water. Invert and unwrap the semifreddo and cut into slices with the hot knife, wiping off the knife between cuts. Top with fresh raspberries to serve.



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Ingredient of the Month

Ever since the spread of coffee westward from its thirteenth-century origins in Ethiopia and East Africa, this delicious bean has become an integral part of many of our lives, from the first steaming cup in the morning to the tiny cups we may sip for a midday pick-me-up. Walk through any Italian city (or American city these days) and you'll be tempted by the aroma of *caffè*. It's an inseparable part of socializing.

Coffee is also a wonderful ingredient to include in desserts of all kinds. One of my favorite intensely coffee-flavored sweets, is an *affogato*, combining hot espresso, vanilla ice cream, whipped cream, and a crumbled Loacker wafer on top. Brewed coffee is a wonderful base for a refreshing granita, a silky mousse, or the tiramisù in this issue. Adding coffee to a chocolate cake (or any chocolate dessert) deepens and enhances the flavor.

I also use instant espresso powder in many of my desserts, such as a panna cotta, or a walnut-and-coffee cake. Just a pinch of espresso powder does the trick. Don't confuse it with instant coffee; it's made by grinding the beans, brewing the espresso, and then drying and crushing the brewed grounds into a powder. You could make it yourself, but there are many good brands to choose from.

Everyone has their favorite blend of coffee beans. When buying them, just be sure to choose a good-quality espresso mix that has been properly roasted. Store the beans in a well-sealed glass or opaque container. It is often recommended not to buy very dark-colored beans or those that are excessively shiny. Try to grind the beans just before using them. When making your espresso, use filtered water if possible, as tap water may contain more or less calcium or other minerals, or chlorine. Water temperature should reach just below the boiling point—200 degrees—and you should serve the coffee in warm cups. Done right, it's easy to see why coffee was once called the drink *dello spirito*, or "of the soul."



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I enjoy peppering in some Italian words in my recipes. I think it adds to the flavor of the recipes, and some words are truly difficult to translate. Using Italian words helps convey the culture's charm and warmth.

The language is a perfect mirror of the complex identity of Italy and its different regions, each with its own special recipes and ingredients, but all of them united in thousands of years of tradition.

Here are some examples of words that are often used and have great depth to them.

Agrodolce

Sweet and sour is a classic combination of flavors that can be found in almost every cuisine around the world. In Italy it's called agrodolce (combining agro, meaning "sour," and dolce, "sweet), a condiment made with vinegar and sugar (or honey), which is cooked down to a syrupy sauce. Herbs and spices and fruits such as raisins can also be added. Once used as a preservative, agrodolce is now a go-to tangy addition to dishes from caponata to a marinade for fresh vegetables to a sauce for grilled pork chops.

Caponata

Caponata is a traditional Sicilian appetizer, side dish, or condiment of fried mixed vegetables, such as eggplant, onions, tomatoes, celery, capers, and olives, marinated in an agrodolce, a sour-sweet sauce made with vinegar and sugar. Depending on the region, ingredients such as nuts and dried fruits may also be included. Dollop it on crusty bread or serve as a side for grilled seafood.

Panelle

Among Sicilian street foods, the chickpea fritters called panelle are iconic. Made with chickpea flour, water, olive oil, and salt, the dough is rolled, sliced, and deep-fried. You can munch these wafers on their own, sprinkled with a little Parmigiano-Reggiano and herbs, or place them between two slices of country bread, as the Sicilians do, for a delicious sandwich filling on their own or with cheese such as ricotta.



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Panzerotti

Another beloved street food, originating in southern and central Italy (especially in Bari, Puglia), panzerotti are deep-fried turnovers whose dough pockets are filled with savory ingredients, such as mozzarella, tomato sauce, and oregano. But a host of ingredients can be used for panzerotti—prosciutto, sausage, peppers, mushrooms, whatever you like. Panzerotti may look like mini calzones but are smaller in size and fried instead of baked.

Spiedini

Italian for "skewers," spiedini are Italian grilled kebabs. Made with either beef, chicken, pork, lamb, or even seafood, typically breaded, and/or accompanied by vegetables such as peppers and onions, spiedini is another great street food you'll find all over Italy. The spiedini alla Romana consists of skewers of fried bread, cheese and anchovy, and spiedini alla Siciliana is made from thinly sliced beef stuffed with a mixture of seasoned breadcrumbs, tomato sauce, chopped onions, and pecorino.

Pizzelle

Crisp, buttery pizzelle, originating in the Abruzzo region of Italy, are thin circular cookies often served at Christmas, Easter, and other special occasions. Cookie batter is baked on a hot patterned griddle, a pizzelle iron, which gives the classically anise-flavored cookies their beautiful, waffled surface. They can be bent while still hot to form a cone for filling with various creams or ice cream.

Trenette

A long, narrow, flat pasta similar to linguine, trenette is a classic pasta of Liguria, especially the capital of Genoa. In the signature regional dish, trenette alla Genovese, the pasta is dressed with a brilliant green basil and pine nut pesto along with diced potato and green beans. Trenette works well with light sauces and seafood. You can buy it in dried form, either straight or curled into nests.

Rollatini

As you can guess, rollatini means "rolled." Meat, seafood, or vegetables are thinly sliced, rolled around a filling, and either baked in or served with a sauce. A classic Italian rollatini is made with eggplant slices that are dredged in flour, fried, slathered with a mixture of cheeses, rolled, baked, and bathed in a tomato sauce. But you can also make rollatini from lightly breaded fish such as tuna and swordfish, chicken, and other meats with an assortment of fillings and an array of sauces.



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Share your own recipe or make your own rendition of one of mine and then post an image on Instagram using the hashtag #lidiasitalyathome. I look forward to including some of your photos in the next issue of this magazine. Sharing food is so important, and I would love to read about what you are doing in the kitchen and see some photos of your techniques and final dishes.

Share your photos; I look forward to learning from you!

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