

CAPONATA

Serve this as a traditional antipasto with a good crusty Italian bread and a glass of chilled Pinot Grigio.

1 Eggplant
¼ cup olive oil
Small onion
Stick of celery
2 tomatoes
6 anchovies
¼ c wine vinegar
Capers
Olives
Salt
Red Pepper Flakes

- Peel and dice an eggplant, toss with salt, put in a colander and drain for at least a half hour.
- Then heat up a heavy skillet and add 1/4 cup olive oil, a small onion, chopped, and a stick of celery, also chopped.
- Add the eggplant and sauté.
- Add three chopped tomatoes, 6 minced anchovies, a pinch of sugar, 1/4 cup wine vinegar, and a spoonful of capers—the best ones come from Pantelleria Island. If your family likes olives, add some of those, too, along with a pinch of red pepper flakes.
- Simmer for ten minutes, cool, and store overnight in a glass container.
- If you like a smoother spreading consistency, you can whirl in the food processor, but don't overdo it.
- Things that are too smooth lose their character.

NOTES:

CIAMBELLONE

Ciambellone is a cross between a cake and a bread, with a nice texture well suited to be served at breakfast or with coffee. The smell of a baking ciambellone is said to turn a scowl into a smile.

4 cups flour
3 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 cup sugar
1 cup milk
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 cup oil
1 teaspoon baking powder
Zest from 1 lemon, finely chopped
Garnish: Milk, coarsely granulated sugar

- Make a mound with the flour on a board or the counter, creating a well in the center.
- Using your fingers, begin alternating the liquid and other dry ingredients into the well, mixing into the flour until all the ingredients are combined, adding additional flour as needed and kneading to make a smooth dough.
- Divide into 2 equal parts and shape into fat rings.
- Brush the tops with milk and sprinkle with sugar.
- Place the coils on a buttered baking sheet and bake at 350 degrees for about 40 minutes or until golden in color.

NOTES:

ROMAINE AND GORGONZOLA SALAD

2 heads of romaine lettuce
Basil
Cherry tomatoes

Wash two heads of romaine lettuce in cold water, discarding the tough outer leaves. Shake dry and tear into bite-sized pieces.

Add basil sprigs and cherry tomatoes, cut in half.

Right before serving, toss the lettuce with Gorgonzola vinaigrette.

Gorgonzola Vinaigrette:

¼ White wine vinegar
¼ Apple juice
1 Tablespoon shallot
2 Tablespoons mustard
2 Teaspoons pine nuts
¼ Walnut oil
3 Tablespoons olive oil
2 Tablespoons Gorgonzola
Black pepper

- Toast pine nuts.
- Put all ingredients in a jar and shake well.
- Makes about 1 cup.
- Store in the fridge for up to 5 days.

NOTES:

RICOTTA CHEESE SUGAR COOKIES

1 cup softened butter
2 cups sugar
1 (16-oz) carton full-fat ricotta cheese
2 eggs
3 teaspoons vanilla (the kind from Mexico is best)
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
4 cups flour

Glaze:

1 cup powdered sugar
milk
2 drops almond extract (optional)
sprinkles

- Preheat oven to 350.
- Mix cookie ingredients to form a sticky dough.
- Drop by teaspoonfuls on an ungreased cookie sheet.
- Bake 10 minutes or until the bottoms turn golden brown (the tops will stay white).
- Transfer to wire racks to cool.
- To make the glaze, stir milk a few drops at a time, along with the almond extract if desired, into the powdered sugar in a saucepan.
- Stir over low heat to create a glaze.
- Drizzle over cooled cookies and top with colored sprinkles.

PASTA FAZOOOL

from the region of Puglia

4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

½ onion

Carrot

Celery

Garlic

Cannellini Beans

4 plum tomatoes

Rosemary

½ pound pasta (ziti)

Garnish:

Flat-leaf parsley

Parmigiana

- Warm 4 tablespoons of fruity extra-virgin olive oil in a large saucepan and gently sauté ½ onion, chopped, a peeled and chopped carrot, a rib of chopped celery and some minced garlic.
- Open a can of cannellini beans and drain, then add to the vegetables along with 4 chopped plum tomatoes, a pinch of fresh rosemary, and 2 cups boiling water.
- Bring back to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for thirty minutes.
- Transfer about 2 cups of the beans and their liquid to a food processor and process to a thick puree.
- Stir the puree back into the beans.
- Add ½ pound of ziti (or other pasta) and another 1-2 cups of boiling water to the beans in the pot.
- Cook, stirring constantly, until the pasta is tender, about 10 minutes.
- Remove from heat. Add salt and lots of black pepper to taste.
- Serve in warm bowls, garnished with a drizzle of olive oil, a sprinkle of chopped flat-leaf parsley, and some Parmigiana.

NOTES:

CIOPPINO

Broth:

1/4 cup olive oil
about 8 anchovies, chopped
4 cloves garlic, chopped
2 bay leaves
1 stalk of celery, diced
1 onion, chopped
1 roasted red bell pepper, chopped 1 cup Chianti plus 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1 quart fish or shrimp stock
6-8 diced fresh tomatoes (use canned if you don't have fresh)
chopped fresh basil
a good pinch of saffron threads
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
1/2 cup chopped Italian flat-leaf parsley
2-3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
salt to taste
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
2 tablespoons dried oregano, or twice that amount fresh
1 teaspoon fennel seeds, crushed with the flat of a knife
1 sprig of rosemary

Seafood:

Use whatever is fresh that day. 1/4 pound or more of each variety: prawns (save the shells for making stock), crab, scallops, mussels, firm fish cut in 1 inch pieces (cod, halibut, scrod, bass), fresh clams, fresh oysters (shucked), calamari for the bravehearted.

- Warm the olive oil and sauté the anchovies in a big pot.
- Add garlic and stir, then add the bay leaves, onion, celery and bell pepper plus 1/2 of the herbs, and sauté.
- Pour in wine, vinegar and Worcestershire and let half the liquid bubble away.
- Then add tomatoes, basil and the rest of the herbs.
- Simmer, then add the fish stock and lemon juice, bringing it all to a boil.
- Finally, toss in the seafood, cover and cook 7-10 minutes.
- Remove any mussels and clams that haven't opened.
- Ladle the stew into wide, shallow dishes and sprinkle with parsley.
- Serve with warm bread.

NOTES:

SPAGHETTI ALLE VONGOLE

4 dozen littleneck clams in their shells, the smaller the better. If you use quahogs, you only need a dozen—just chop the clam meat fine.

2 tablespoons of sea salt

1 pound dry spaghetti

1/2 cup olive oil

4-8 garlic cloves, minced

1/2 cup white wine (Principessa Gavia is preferred)

2 tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley

- Scrub the clam shells under cold running water.
 - Cook the spaghetti until al dente.
 - In a heavy pan with a lid, heat the olive oil and sauté the garlic.
 - Add the clams in their shells and the white wine, bring to a boil, cover the pan, and cook until the clams open. This should take a few minutes, and feel free to add more wine.
 - Discard clams that do not open; you'll find a few rejects in every bunch.
 - Remove the clams with a slotted spoon.
 - Add the cooked spaghetti to the sauté pan, stirring it into the sauce.
 - Add the parsley.
 - Serve in individual bowls, topped with the clams.
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ROSEMARY LEMONADE

In the Old Country version of “Sleeping Beauty,” the princess was awakened from her enchanted slumber with a whiff of rosemary-scented water. The prince was probably miles away, lost.

Two cups water
Two cups sugar
Two cups lemon juice
Grated rind of one lemon
Two sprigs of rosemary
Ice cubes
Cold water or club soda

- Combine the water and sugar in a saucepan and bring the mixture to a boil over high heat. Boil the liquid three minutes.
- Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the lemon juice, lemon rind and rosemary. Refrigerate at least one hour.
- Strain the mixture into a storage container.
- To fix a glass of lemonade, place 5 to 6 ice cubes in a drinking glass.
- Fill the glass about a third full with the lemon syrup, add water or club soda to the top of the glass, stir and drink.
- Makes about 3 cups.

NOTES:

LASAGNE MAGRO

In the old country, if you can afford meat, you don't hide it in a lasagne. The original recipe is meatless. This delicious lasagne is commonly found in southern Italy.

At least a quart of good tomato sauce, preferably homemade
1 large carton full fat ricotta cheese
1 cup grated Parmesano Reggiano cheese
1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
1 large fresh egg
½ onion, chopped
1/4 cup chopped parsley
1/4 cup chopped fresh basil
½ pound chopped fresh spinach
8 ounces additional mozzarella cheese, sliced thin
4 ounces additional grated parmesan cheese
1 package dry lasagne noodles

- Mix the ricotta and grated cheeses together with egg, onion, spinach and herbs.
- Cover the bottom of a large lasagne pan with olive oil and then sauce.
- Add a little water and mix.
- Make an overlapping layer of the dry noodles across the bottom of the pan.
- Spread sauce on top, making sure the pasta is covered.
- Add a layer of the ricotta mixture and mozzarella slices.
- Continue in this manner until you run out of pasta.
- Top with sauce, add another layer of mozzarella, then sprinkle on the parmesan.
- Cover with foil and bake at 375 F for about forty minutes.
- Remove the foil and cook another 10 minutes.
- Let rest an additional 10 minutes.
- Serve in squares, topped with a basil sprig.

NOTES:

ORATA OU TRIGLIE ALLA SAN NICOLA

Traditionally, individual fish are dressed inside and out with olive oil, garlic, herbs and lemon slices, then wrapped in parchment for roasting, which is a handsome thing to send to the table. But it all works fine with fish steaks or fillets in foil instead of parchment. Halibut, tuna steaks and cod are good choices, or if you live by the sea, try a small, perfectly fresh tinker mackerel (whole) or a small bluefish, sometimes called blue snapper, in season.

Full Fish
Olive oil
Garlic
1 teaspoon flat-leaf parsley
1 sprig oregano
Lemon

- Preheat the oven to 400, or fire up the gas grill.
- For each portion, dress the fish with 2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil, sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, 1 teaspoon minced flat-leaf parsley, 1 sprig oregano, 2 lemon slices, garlic slivers and 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice.
- Wrap each portion in foil or parchment.
- Place each packet on a baking sheet and slide into the oven or place on the grill and cover.
- Bake for 20 minutes, or until the fish just begins to flake.

NOTES:

SAVORY FRITTATA

Always use naturally nested eggs laid by uncaged chickens. The eggs taste better, and the chickens will thank you.

4 medium potatoes, scrubbed and diced fine

6 large, fresh eggs

1/4 cup cream

3/4 cup chopped tomatoes

1 small zucchini, grated

1/2 sweet onion, chopped

1 Tablespoon minced herbs, including oregano, thyme, flat leaf parsley, red pepper flakes, garlic

2 Tablespoons olive oil + 1 Tablespoon sweet butter

salt and pepper to taste

1 cup shredded cheese

- In a wide ovenproof skillet, grill the potatoes in olive oil and butter until browned.
- Add zucchini and onions, then tomatoes and herbs.
- Season with salt and pepper.
- Whisk the eggs together with cream and pour the mixture over potatoes.
- Sprinkle on the cheese.
- Bake at 400 degrees for approximately 25 minutes until top is firm.
- Serve in wedges warm, or at room temperature.

NOTES:

TORTA CREMA

1 stick unsalted butter, softened
1/2 cup shortening
2 cups sugar
5 eggs, separated
2 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 cup buttermilk
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 small can flaked coconut
1 cup chopped pecans

- Cream the butter and shortening, add the sugar and beat some more.
- Add egg yolks and beat.
- Mix flour and baking soda, and add alternately with buttermilk.
- Stir in vanilla, coconut, and pecans.
- Fold in stiffly beaten egg whites.
- Pour batter into three well-greased round cake pans or a 13 x 9 x 2-inch baking pan.
- Bake at 350 for 40 to 45 minutes, until a stick of dry spaghetti inserted in the middle comes out clean.
- Cool before frosting.

Cream Cheese Icing:

1 package cream cheese, softened
1/2 cup pure unsalted butter, softened
1 box powdered sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
Chopped pecans and coconut

- Beat cream cheese until smooth.
- In another bowl, combine sugar and butter; mix well.
- Add to cream cheese.
- Stir in vanilla and beat until smooth.
- Frost cooled cake in pan or in layers.
- Top with chopped pecans and a sprinkle of coconut.
- Serve with good strong coffee, or espresso if you have the equipment.

NOTES:

PIGNOLI COOKIES

1 pound of almonds, ground in the food processor
2 sticks pure, unsalted butter at room temperature
½ cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
pinch of salt
2 cups flour
1 cup pignoli (pine nuts), chopped
powdered sugar

- Cream the butter and sugar together until soft.
- Blend in the ground almonds, salt, vanilla and flour.
- Roll into little cigar-shaped pieces about a half-inch thick.
- Roll these in the chopped pine nuts and bend them into a half-moon shape.
- Place these 1-inch apart on greased baking pans.
- Bake at 350F for 15-to-20 minutes.
- The crescents should not be browned.
- Cool about 5 minutes, then dust with powdered sugar.

NOTES: