

TAKE A TRIP TO THE ROLLING HILLS OF TUSCANY

Tastes of Italia

THE BEST IN ITALIAN COOKING

FEBRUARY 2013

The Winter Table

Pasta • Polenta • Stews • Chocolate Desserts and more



40

Recipes To Make
The Winter Warm

Home Grown
Recipes From
Boston's
North End

by Joe Famularo

FEBRUARY 2013

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GOOD TASTES

TASTE OF THE MONTH • SPICE RACK • WINE WATCH • BOOK SHELF • SWEET TOOTH • CHEF'S SECRETS



TASTE OF THE MONTH

Pecorino Romano

A hard, salty, sheep's milk cheese perfect for grating, Pecorino Romano has a 2,000-year history and was a staple in the diets of many ancient Romans. It is still made according to the original recipe. One of Italy's most historic cheeses, it is aged about eight months and has a distinct aromatic and sharp flavor profile that allows it to stand up to highly flavored sauces: spaghetti alla carbonara is a prime example. Popular in central and southern Italy, this cheese is traditionally enjoyed with fresh fava beans on the first day of May. Pecorino Romano shouldn't be confused with cheeses that are labeled "Romano" in American grocery stores. This type of Romano usually includes cow's milk and is milder than authentic Pecorino Romano. Pecorino Romano is considered one of the most essential cheeses in traditional Italian cuisine, and can be grated and served over pasta, salads, breads and soups. Historically most often made in Central and Southern Italy and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, Pecorino Romano traveled well and was a staple of the shepherd's diet. A superb pecorino cheese contains all the aromas of the open pastures where the sheep have grazed. Today Pecorino Romano is a name-protected (DOC) cheese, with its production regulated and supervised by the Consorzio per la Tutela del Formaggio Pecorino Romano.

PECORINO ROMANO



SPAGHETTI CARBONARA
(with Pecorino)

- 2** tablespoons butter
- ½** cup diced pancetta
- 1** garlic clove
- 12** ounces spaghetti
- 2** eggs, beaten
- ½** cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, divided
- ½** cup freshly grated romano cheese, divided
- Salt and pepper to taste**
- Minced fresh parsley, for garnish**

Melt the butter in a large pan, add the pancetta and garlic, and cook until the garlic turns brown. Discard the garlic. Cook the spaghetti in a large pot of salted, boiling water until al dente, then drain and add to the pancetta. Remove the pan from the heat, pour in the eggs, add half the Parmesan and half the romano, and season with salt and pepper. Mix well. Add the remaining cheese, toss, and top with a sprinkle of parsley.

Makes 4 servings.



SECRET INGREDIENT

Mushroom Magic

In Italy, in addition to the treasured truffle, porcini mushrooms are a true culinary delicacy, bringing rich, rustic flavor to cold weather meals. Harvested in the fall, porcini mushrooms can be eaten fresh, but a majority are dried and treasured for Italian cooking all through the long winter season. Used in soup, pasta, and risotto, porcini have large caps and thick white stalks. Their flavor is mild and woody and goes just as well with mild delicate dishes as it does with rich robust options. Italians prefer porcini cooked with thyme over most other herbs. Use them in place of meat or add them as a complement. Try your favorite cacciatore recipe, but replace your chicken (or rabbit if you're a traditionalist) with porcini mushrooms instead. Stewed porcini make a hearty side dish, or can be served over rice or pasta. Simmer them with garlic, thyme, onion, and a little olive oil, then season with sea salt and freshly ground pepper. A powder made from ground porcini mushrooms can be mixed into sauces, soups and stews. The porcini powder can also take the place of some of the flour in pasta recipes, providing a rich, earthy flavor. When making casseroles and lasagne, try sprinkling a little porcini powder on each layer.

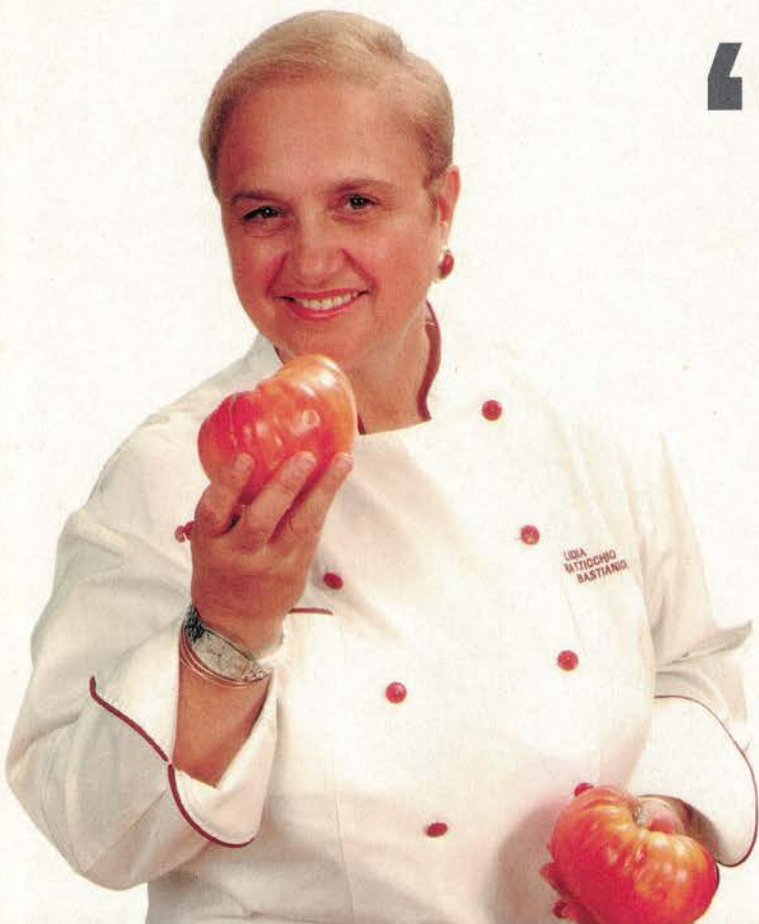
Porcini Mushrooms with Lemon and Parsley on Toast

- 6** tablespoons olive oil
- 1½** pounds fresh button mushrooms, cut in half
- 2** tablespoons butter
- 1** tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1** tablespoon freshly grated lemon zest
- ½** cup white wine
- ¼** cup chopped fresh parsley
- Kosher salt and pepper to taste**
- 4** slices toasted Italian bread

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet. Add the mushrooms and arrange in a single layer. Cook for 2 minutes, until slightly caramelized, then stir to mix. Stir in butter, lemon juice, zest and wine. Bring mixture to a boil, then reduce heat to simmer and cook until mushrooms are tender. Add parsley, salt and pepper and serve over toasted bread.

Makes 4 servings.

tip of the month



“ Traditional pesto is made with basil leaves, pinoli nuts, garlic, olive oil and a little salt. But in Sicily, they use almonds or pistachios instead of pinoli nuts, and there’s a bit of parsley and ripe tomatoes. I use the starchy pasta water (in the pesto). I drain the pasta and put a few tablespoons of the water back into a bowl with the pasta. Then I add the pesto and toss it. The pesto never gets cooked; it just gets warmed up by the pasta. Some people add cheese while making pesto. I like to add it after for maximum flavor.”

From Lidia Bastianich,
Lidia's Table and American Public Media



WINE TO WATCH

Chianti Rufina

If you love wine, you know that Chianti is an Italian red wine from from the Tuscan region. While Chianti Classico is perhaps the best-known version of this centuries-old wine, another one worth knowing is Chianti Rufina. The smallest of the seven sub-zones of Chianti, the Italian government awarded Rufina its own DOCG (Denominazione di Origine Controllata) in 1996 and it officially separated from its esteemed cousin Chianti Classico. Rufina is made predominantly from Sangiovese grapes, but can be blended with percentages of traditional and non-traditional varietals that create the now iconic Super Tuscan wines. Rufinas are classic Old World style wines, and like a true Chianti, have brighter acids than many other big red wines. This added acid is the element that makes them so favorable for pairing with tomatoes and olive oil—staples of Tuscan cuisine. Many world-respected wine critics call Rufina the Bordeaux of Italy. A great Chianti Rufina is a wine experience that shouldn't be missed. Aged for at least 38 months before release, it is nicely balanced with fruit, spice and earthy aromas, flavors, and acids that sing with food. It pairs well with meat, succulent stews, and savory pastas.

What to Try Next...

Rabbit

Most Americans are not totally familiar with rabbit as a choice cuisine meat. If you're like many, you may have seen it on a restaurant menu once or twice. But rabbit is one of the most viable protein sources in the world. They reproduce rapidly and have a reproduction season that lasts about eight months of the year. Rabbit is often accurately compared to chicken in taste, mostly because both of these meats are neutral in flavor and therefore pick up flavors and seasonings while cooking. Italian, French, English, and Moroccan cuisines all have many traditional rabbit recipes. The famed Italian dish Cacciatore (meaning hunter style) often includes rabbit or chicken. Rabbit meat is one of the leanest meats (leaner than chicken, beef, or pork) with very high amounts of protein. One caution is they are so lean they contain very little of the essential fatty acids needed in a healthy diet. When buying rabbit, there are two general options: Fryer, which is the youngest and most tender; and roaster, which is older with meat that's not quite as tender. The fryer is the more desirable option.

Rabbit Cacciatore

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1/3 cup diced pancetta
- 1 rabbit, cut into pieces (like chicken)
- Salt and Pepper
- 3/4 cup dry white wine
- 1 fresh thyme sprig
- 1 pound tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and coarsely chopped

Melt the butter in a pan with the olive oil. Add the onion and pancetta and cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. Add the rabbit, increase the heat to medium, and cook, turning frequently, until browned all over. Season with salt and pepper to taste, stir in the wine, and add the thyme, then cover and cook for 20 minutes. Add the tomatoes, lower the heat and simmer for about 1 hour. If the cooking juices are too runny, thicken them by stirring in a pinch of flour. Transfer to a serving dish, discard the thyme, and serve. You can serve this dish with polenta, if desired.

Makes 6 servings.



Dried Figs Add Texture to Desserts

When it comes to figs, what comes to mind for many Americans are Fig Newtons. But as Italians know, there is so much more to this ancient fruit. Abundant in the Mediterranean and Middle East, figs are also grown in California. In fact, California supplies 100 percent of the dried figs in the United States. While figs are available fresh a couple of times a year, it's the dried version that many home cooks and culinary professionals reach for year round. And why not? They have a lot going for them.

Fig and Nut Cookies

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 3 eggs, slightly beaten
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 2 tablespoons softened butter

- 1 cup chopped dried figs
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 3/4 cup chopped walnuts
- 1/2 cup chopped hazelnuts
- 1 teaspoon orange zest
- 2 tablespoons fresh orange juice
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon

Preheat oven to 350°F.

In a large bowl, combine flour and baking soda. Beat in eggs, sugar, vanilla and butter until mixture is well combined. Stir in remaining ingredients.

Spray a baking sheet with nonstick cooking spray. Drop batter by the teaspoonful onto prepared baking sheet. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Let cookies cool on baking sheet for 5 minutes, then transfer to a rack to finish cooling.

Makes about 36 cookies.