

Recipes for "An American Chef Cooks Italian"

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Bitter Salad with Old Balsamico

Vinaigrette:

1 medium shallot, finely minced

1 small clove garlic, finely minced

3 tablespoons condiment-grade balsamic vinegar

1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt

Freshly ground pepper

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Salad:

4 ounces duck or chicken giblets (livers and hearts), hearts sliced thin, livers cut into 1/4-inch pieces

1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil

6 thin slices Italian pancetta, cut into 1/2-inch pieces

3 tablespoons toasted walnut meats

6 handfuls bitter lettuces (dandelion, endive, wild arugula, young radicchio)

Aceto balsamico tradizionale "extra vecchia"

Parmigiano-Reggiano

Prepare the vinaigrette first. Combine the shallot, garlic and balsamic vinegar in a small stainless-steel mixing bowl. Whisk in the salt and a few turns of freshly ground black pepper. Mix in the olive oil and taste for seasoning. (Adjust the vinaigrette to mitigate the bitterness of the lettuces.)

Salt and pepper the giblets. Warm a small sauté pan. Add the olive oil, and raise the heat to high. Add the hearts first, along with the pancetta, and sauté for one minute, stirring often. Add the liver, and sauté for an additional minute or until the livers are just pink and still tender.

Transfer the giblets and pancetta immediately to the bowl of vinaigrette. Add the walnuts.

Warm the vinaigrette over medium heat. Add the lettuces, and toss briskly for roughly 30 seconds or less, just long enough to warm and mix the greens without wilting them.

Divide the salad evenly onto six warm plates. Drizzle the *aceto balsamico* over each portion, and shower each salad with thin slivers of Parmigiano. This is best accomplished by using a straight-handled peeler and a chunk of Parmigiano. *Serves six.*

Tramezzino of Sand Dabs with Capers, Lemon and Parsley

12 tablespoons sweet butter

2 leeks, finely minced

Sea salt

1/4 cup water

5 tablespoons finely chopped Italian parsley

6 sand dabs or petrale sole, filleted and skinned to yield 12 fillets of 1 to 2 ounces each

3 tablespoons olive oil

3 tablespoons small, brined capers

Sectioned flesh of 1/2 lemon, seeded and chopped

Melt 2 tablespoons butter in a small sauté pan. Add the minced leeks, a little salt and the water. Cover and sweat the leeks for eight to 10 minutes over low heat until soft. Allow to cool. Add 3 tablespoons of chopped parsley.

Lightly salt the fillets on both sides, and arrange them adjacent to one another as they were cut from the fish. Spread a thin layer of the leek-parsley mixture on every other fillet, and top each with its mate to form a sandwich.

Warm the olive oil in a large seasoned or nonstick skillet over moderately high heat. But the fish in the pan and brown on both sides, taking care when you turn the fish not to break or separate them.

Transfer the fillets to six very warm plates.

Add the remaining sweet butter directly to the pan. Allow it to brown lightly. Add the capers, lemon and the remaining 2 tablespoons of parsley, and spoon this sauce around the plated fillets. *Serves six.*

Farrotto with Wild Mushrooms

1 quart rich, blond poultry-stock
1/2 ounce dry porcini mushrooms
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 small pinch saffron (about 15 threads)
2 ounces diced white of leek
1 cup farro (see note)
1/2 cup dry white wine
1 1/2 cups mixed wild mushrooms such as boletus, chanterelles or black trumpets
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
4 tablespoons freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Note: *Farro* is an ancient form of wheat with a particularly nutty taste and texture, rich in starch, fiber and vitamins. Look for it in the pasta and grain section of specialty gourmet food stores, or order it online from Dean and DeLuca (www.dean-deluca.com) or A.G. Ferrari (www.agferrari.com).

In a small saucepan, add the dry porcini mushrooms to the poultry stock; bring it gently to a simmer and let stand for eight to 10 minutes or until the porcini are tender and rehydrated. Strain the broth, retaining both the mushrooms and the broth. Return the broth to the heat and bring it to a low simmer.

Choose a heavy pot with about a 2-quart capacity--a saucepan or casserole dish made of laminated metal with a stainless-steel interior is ideal. Warm 1 tablespoon butter in the pot, add the saffron and diced leeks and soften them for about four minutes. Raise the heat slightly and add the *farro*. Toast it for five minutes, stirring often to prevent it from sticking to the bottom and to make sure it is well-coated with hot butter.

Add the wine. Reduce it almost entirely, then add the wild mushrooms and the rehydrated porcini. Allow the mushrooms to release their water, and reduce this liquid almost entirely. Then add about 1 1/2 cups hot broth, enough to just barely cover the *farro*. Stir well to combine all the ingredients; reduce the heat and simmer gently, stirring often.

As the *farro* absorbs the broth, continue to add more broth in 1/4 cup increments, keeping the liquid at a constant simmer. Stir often, and continue to add the broth, keeping the level just above the *farro*. Once all the broth has been added, continue simmering until the *farro* is lightly chewy but yielding (total simmering time should be 25 to 30 minutes). Add the remaining butter and Parmigiano. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Finally, correct the consistency of the *farro* and surrounding liquid by adjusting the heat. The finished *farro* should be coated and nearly pourable, like good *risotto*, the whole reduced to the point that there is no separation between broth and grain. When you reach this point, spoon the *farrotto* into the serving bowls, then rock each bowl from side to side to distribute it flat in the bottom. *Serves six to eight.*

Rotolo Pepato of Pork

1 clove fresh garlic

1 large sprig rosemary

1 teaspoon cayenne red-pepper flakes

1 teaspoon fennel seed, pounded in a mortar

1 bone-in blade-end loin of pork, 8 to 9 pounds, trimmed and butterflied (see note)

2 teaspoons salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Sauce (optional, recipe follows)

Combine the garlic and rosemary, and chop coarsely. Add the cayenne flakes and fennel seed, and mix together in a small bowl. Rub the roast with the garlic mixture. Salt the meat lightly, and grind an abundant quantity of fresh black pepper all over the surface. If you can, cook this roast on the spit. Prepare a hardwood fire using oak or almond or grape prunings. Allow the fire to develop a 4-inch bed of embers. Sear the meat in front of high heat, then adjust the fire to an evenly moderate heat. Allow the roast to turn for about 45 minutes or until it reaches an internal temperature of 138 degrees F (see note).

If using an oven, preheat it to 400 degrees F. Cook the roast for 30 minutes at this temperature, then turn the heat down to 350 degrees F for another 15 minutes or until the roast reaches 138 degrees F (see note) internally.

Remove the roast from the spit or oven, and allow it to rest for 10 minutes before serving. Remove the strings. Cutting from bone to bone, serve each guest a chop. Serve with a stew of fresh shell beans or seasonal vegetables. *Serves eight to 10.*

Note: The choicest roast from the pig comes from the shoulder-end loin. Ask your butcher for a "shoulder or blade-end loin nine ribs down." The meat at this end of the loin is dark, moist and very flavorful. Ask the butcher to butterfly the roast for a spiral stuffing. The FDA prescribes a minimum of 155 degrees F for pork, in order to kill off all bacterial pathogens, including trichina. However, Bertolli and other culinary experts believe that a juicier 140 degrees F to 145 degrees F (the temperature a roast will reach while resting if it's taken out at 138 degrees F) is safe.

Sauce

While the meat is roasting, brown the trimmings in a saucepan. Allow a residue to form on the bottom of the pan. Add a little diced carrot, celery, onion and a small sprig of rosemary and a little meat broth or water, scraping up all bits adhering to the bottom of the pan to dissolve them. Cover with broth or water, and allow to simmer for 40 minutes. Strain away the meat and vegetables, and reduce the liquid to about 1/2 cup. Add any juices the roast releases while resting. Spoon a little of this sauce over each portion.

Torta of Raisins Cooked in Vincotto

Tart dough:

2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour

1/4 cup granulated sugar

1/4 teaspoon salt

8 ounces unsalted butter

1 egg yolk

Place the flour, sugar and salt in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a paddle. Cut the butter into 1-inch cubes. Add the butter to the flour mixture. Mix in the butter on lowest speed until the dough barely starts to come together in the middle of the bowl. Stop the mixer, add the yolk, and continue to mix until a uniform dough is produced. Divide the dough into two pieces, the first approximately 12 ounces, and the second 9 ounces for the top. Wrap the two pieces in plastic, and refrigerate for a minimum of four hours.

Raisin filling:

2 1/2 cups mixed raisins in equal quantities (dark seedless, golden, Muscat and currants)

1 cup vincotto or saba (see note)

1/2 cup water

1/2 cup sugar

5 tablespoons condiment-grade balsamic vinegar

Pinch of salt

1 tablespoon potato starch or 5 teaspoons flour

Note: *Vincotto*, or concentrated grape must, is sometimes available in the condiment section of gourmet groceries as *saba* or *sapa*. It can be purchased through mail order from Corti Brothers of Sacramento: (800) 509-3663. A similar product is available through Dean and DeLuca.

Combine the raisins and all the other ingredients except the potato starch in a stainless-steel saucepan. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer and cook the raisins for 10 to 15 minutes until plump and tender. Dissolve the potato starch or flour in a small amount of cold water, and stir it into the raisin mixture while it's still on the heat. Continue to stir until the mixture achieves a very thick, syrupy consistency. Remove from the heat and allow to cool.

Roll the larger dough ball into a circular form, approximately 10 1/2 inches in diameter. Transfer it to a false-bottomed tart tin and press the dough into the sides of the tin. Perforate the bottom of the shell all over with a fork. Roll the other dough into a circle large enough to cover the top. Refrigerate or freeze the shells until very cold.

Assembly and baking:

1 egg

1 tablespoon cream

Granulated sugar

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Bake the tart bottom only until light brown, about 10 minutes. Allow to cool. Raise the oven temperature to 375 degrees F. Fill the tart bottom with the raisin mixture. Place the top on, press to close and trim the edges. Make a few thin slashes on the top center of the tart. Mix the egg and cream and brush it all over the top. Sprinkle liberally with granulated sugar. Place the *torta* in the oven, and bake for 25 minutes, or until the top is evenly browned. Serve slightly warm. *Serves six to eight.*