

“Finding love in Sicily”

February 2009



This menu is inspired by my Sister Michele's romantic goings-on in Sicily. Sicily can be a very seductive place. Here's to “Finding love in Sicily”!!!!

Sicily is possibly the most historically diverse place in the Mediterranean. The Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Angevins, Hapsburgs and Bourbons all controlled the island at one point.

When the Greeks saw the island of Sicily, they fell in love, sent their fleets, and set up colonies. The Romans saw what the Greeks had, fought them for it, and became the new conquerors. The Arabs saw what the Romans had, fought them for it, and put the island under their dominion. From the north came the Normans, the Angevins, Hapsburgs and Bourbons, and when they saw Sicily, they too, went to war, and conquered.

Each civilization brought their own foods that are still found today. Perhaps the most famous is that of the Arabs. They brought cane sugar, pine nuts, saffron, nutmeg, pepper and hard wheat. Hard wheat worked its way throughout Italy and is now widely used to make hard pastas. The “sweet and sour” theme throughout Sicilian cuisine today is widely credited to the Arab conquerors.



Sicily is a large island of widely varied climate. There are subtropical areas growing prickly pears in abundance; every form of citrus is grown - lemons, oranges, blood oranges. And there is the great Mount Etna, a highly active volcano that both destroys whatever is in the path of its lava eruptions and fertilizes the soil to incomparable richness. The crops that grow in this soil have no parallel. The quality of the vegetables gives a clue to the dishes of Sicily. Since their vegetables are of

superior taste and quality, no Sicilian would defile them by creating complex dishes that mask the fresh flavor of their ingredients. Simplicity allows the pure taste of the vegetables to emerge. This is a key attitude to cooking, prevalent all over Sicily.

The flag of Sicily was created in 1282 AD. The three sides and the triskelion (three interlocked spirals, or three bent human legs), represent good luck and the three-sidedness of Sicily.



Tonight's Menu

- Antipasti
 - Antipasti di Frutti di Mare (Seafood antipasto) – 2x recipe
- Primo
 - Pasta con le Sarde (Pasta with Sardines) – 3x recipe
- Secondo
 - Involtini di Manzo (Sicilian Beef Rolls) – 3x recipe
 - Josie's Tomato Sauce
 - Carciofi Gratinati (Baked Artichokes) – 3x recipe
- Insalata
 - Insalata di Arancie, Finocchi, ed Olive Nere (Orange, Fennel, and Black Olive Salad) – 3x recipe
- Dolce
 - Amaretti (Almond Cookies)

Check out our family blog:

ouritaliantable.wordpress.com

A map of Sicily



Antipasti di Frutti di Mare

Seafood antipasto

Anywhere in Italy there is seafood, there is “frutti di mare”, the “fruits of the sea”. And nowhere is seafood more bountiful than Sicily. In this recipe, the “fruits” are marinated overnight with a acidic dressing to “cook” the seafood. This is similar to a Spanish ceviche except that the ingredients are lightly boiled first. The biggest tip for this recipe is to not overcook the seafood. It will cook further in the marinade.

Recipe for 6.

Ingredients and equipment:

Marinade

- Juice of 2 to 3 lemons
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

Seafood (choose some or all of the following)

- 1 pound small squid, cleaned
- ½ pound medium shrimp (shelled and de-veined or use shrimp with shells and clean after boiling)
- ½ pound small bay scallops
- 1 pound baby or full size octopus
- 1 dozen mussels
- 1 dozen clams

Salad

- 1 red bell pepper
- 1 red onion
- 4 cloves of garlic
- ¼ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
- Salt and pepper to taste

Note: You can add a little salt and pepper to the marinade for the overnight preparation but don't add too much. Adding salt at this stage can make the seafood mushy when it's finished marinading. Add salt and pepper at the end to taste.

Directions:

In a non-metal bowl, whisk the marinade ingredients together and set aside.

Choose a container that you can use to marinate the seafood overnight and set on the counter.

In a large pot, bring 6 quarts water to boil and set up an ice bath (a bowl with cold water and ice) nearby.

Slice the calamari bodies into rings. Cook all the shrimp for 1 1/2 minutes and plunge into the ice bath. Cook the calamari for 1 minute, and plunge into the ice bath. Repeat with the bay scallops cooking 1 minute and add to the ice bath. Thoroughly drain the seafood from ice bath and transfer to the container for overnight marination.

In the same pot and water used to boil the seafood, add a wine cork (not the synthetic kind; this is a myth disproved by science but why mess with tradition), bring to boil and add the octopus. Reduce to a simmer and cook for 45 minutes, or until tender. Octopus will shrink in size by one-half. Drain and cool and slice to a bite size and add to the container for overnight marination.

In a 10-to-12-inch saute pan, place mussels and clams with 1 cup of water and bring to a boil. Cover the pan and let the seafood steam, removing each shellfish as it opens until they are all cooked and removed from the pan. Discard any shellfish that do not open. Let shellfish cool, remove mussels and clams from the shells and add to the overnight marinade bowl.

Prepare the “salad” components for the overnight marinade.

Dice the red peppers to a ¼ inch size, removing all the internal ribs and seeds. Add to the overnight marinade bowl. Chop the red onion into ¼ inch pieces and add to the overnight marinade bowl. Peel garlic, crush with the side of a knife and add to the overnight marinade. Coarsely chop the parsley and add to the overnight marinade.

Add the the prepared marinade dressing to the entire mixture in the overnight marinade bowl and toss well. Cover and place in the refrigerator. Stir and mix the antipasto several times while it is marinating.

Before serving, remove from the refrigerator and allow the antipasto to warm up a bit and re-toss all the ingredients. Pick out the crushed garlic and discard. Salt and pepper to taste. Serve in a nice clear glass dish so all the colors can be seen by your guests.

Serving suggestions:

 Serve in a martini glass to make a nice hand held antipasti for guests.

 Serve in a lettuce leaf on a dish to provide a nice green backdrop.

 Add a slice of brushetta (thinly sliced toasted bread rubbed with garlic) as a crispy counterpoint to the antipasto.

Pasta con le Sarde

Pasta with Sardines

Pasta con le Sarde is rumored to have been created by the Arabs when they landed on the coast of Sicily in 827 AD. Fresh sardines and wild fennel are available all around Sicily and the addition of raisins, pine nuts and saffron adds the characteristic Arab flavors. *Pasta con le Sarde* is practically the national dish of Sicily.

Recipe for 6 to 8.

Ingredients and equipment:

- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 2/3 cup freshly ground dried bread crumbs
- 1 medium onion
- 1 ½ pounds fresh sardines (1 pound after being cleaned)
- or –
- 2 4-ounce cans, sardines in olive oil, drained and lightly rinsed with water if desired
- ¼ cup chopped parsley
- ¼ cup pine nuts
- ¼ cup raisins or currants
- 1 pound bucatini or spaghetti
- Leafy tops of 1 bulb of fennel
- ½ teaspoon saffron
- Salt and pepper
- High quality olive oil

Note: DO NOT serve grated cheese with this dish. It's extremely bad luck and doesn't taste well either.

Directions:

In a large skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Add the breadcrumbs and cook, stirring constantly until golden brown. Remove and drain on paper towels.

Slice the onions. Add the remaining olive oil to the pan, then add the onions and cook until the onions are soft.

Coarsely chop the sardines and add the sardines and cook gently for about 3 minutes. Stir in the pine nuts, raisins (or currants) and parsley. Remove from heat.

Bring 6 quarts of salted water and the fennel tops (remove one fennel top for later) to boil in a large pot. When the water boils, remove the the fennel tops and discard. Add the bucatini (or spaghetti) to the boiling water and cook to 30 seconds less than the box instructions. Just before the pasta is done, remove ½ cup of the pasta water and dissolve the saffron in it and set aside.

Drain the pasta and add it to the sardine mixture. Heat and combine the pasta and sardine mixture over a medium-low heat, stirring constantly. Stir in the saffron water

and continue to cook. This entire step should take about 30 seconds to 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper (Careful, the sardines will add a lot of salt).

Finely chop the remaining fennel top to prepare it as a garnish.

Serve the pasta and sardine mixture on individual plates or a large serving dish. Sprinkle with breadcrumbs, dress with high quality olive oil and the chopped fennel tops. Serve hot.

Involtini di Manzo

Sicilian Beef Rolls¹

Involtini. Rolls of....beef, veal, chicken, pesce spada (swordfish)you name it. Italians love rolling things. This version of the involtini is stuffed with a typical Sicilian filling of parsley, cheese, garlic, raisins and pignoli (pine nuts). In this recipe, one version is finished with a simmer in tomato sauce and the second version is coated in breadcrumbs, pan fried and served with lemon.

Recipe for 8 involtini. Make 2 or 3 per person.

Ingredients and equipment:

- 1 cup of chopped parsley
- 1/3 cup of fresh young Pecorino cheese
- 1/3 cup of grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts (pignoli)
- 2 tablespoons raisins (or currants)
- 2 cloves of garlic, diced
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- About 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 8 slices of very thin beef
- 8 very thin slices of mortadella or prosciutto (ask for it be sliced extra thin)
- Olive oil to fry
- Toothpicks

To finish:

- Homemade tomato sauce (if finishing in sauce)
- or –
- 2 eggs, freshly ground breadcrumbs and lemons (if finishing with lemon)

Directions:

In a medium sized bowl, mix some parsley, Pecorino cheese, Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, pine nuts, raisins (or currants) and garlic. Toss together and season to taste with salt and freshly ground pepper.

Drizzle the mixture with 2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil while tossing the mixture. The olive oil will help to hold the filling together but should not leave the filling soaked - use your discretion.

Lay out the slices of beef. (If not very thin, pound with a meat mallet or rolling pin until very thin.) Lay the slice of the mortadella or prosciutto onto the meat.

Spoon about 1 tablespoons of the filling on top of each slide. Be careful not to overdo it

¹ Recipe courtesy of Michele Becci, Joe's sister

with the filling. A little goes a long way.

Roll up each slice of beef and Secure with a toothpick. Some of the filling will fall out and that's OK.

To finish in tomato sauce:

Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Once hot but not smoking, brown the rolls on each side - roughly 3-5 minutes per side. Remove from pan once browned.

Once all rolls are browned, place back in the skillet. Cover with homemade tomato sauce and simmer for 30-45 minutes until the rolls are cooked.

Serve hot with some tomato sauce and sprinkled with chopped parsley, reminding your guests to remove the toothpicks. Serve with passed grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese.

To finish with lemon:

Preheat oven to 370 degrees.

Lightly beat 2 eggs in a medium sized bowl. Place 1 cup of breadcrumbs in another bowl.

Dip the beef rolls first in the egg, then in the breadcrumb, making sure all surfaces are breaded.

Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Once hot but not smoking, brown the rolls on each side - roughly 3-5 minutes per side. Remove from pan once browned and sprinkle with salt while still hot.

Once all rolls are browned, place back in skillet and place in the oven for about 15 minutes until the meat is cooked through.

Serve hot with sprinkled with chopped parsley, reminding your guests to remove the toothpicks. Serve with a wedge of lemon for squeezing.

Sugo di pomodoro

Ragú

(Josie's) Tomato Sauce

Every grandmother has a favorite tomato sauce for using with pasta or other dishes. This is a version dedicated to Josephine Becci. There is no limit to the number of “family secrets” for sauce. This recipe is a simple tomato sauce that can be made in 40 minutes and used in any dish that requires tomato sauce. Some popular additions or changes are listed at the end.

Makes about 6 cups. Can be frozen for up to 6 months.

Ingredients and equipment:

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- ½ onion, ½-inch dice
- Pinch of red crushed pepper (optional)
- 2 to 4 cloves of garlic, chopped or sliced, your choice
- 1 carrot trimmed at top and bottom, ½-inch dice (don't bother to peel)
- 1 celery stalk trimmed at tap top and bottom, ½-inch dice
- Pinch of salt
- 2-4 sprigs of thyme or a shake of dried thyme
- 2 28-oz cans of peeled whole tomatoes, crushed by hand along with juices (use good quality tomatoes preferably San Marzano tomatoes)
- Pepper to taste
- Fresh basil (optional)

Note: It seems obvious but tomato sauce is all about the canned tomatoes. Making sauce with fresh tomatoes is a whole different recipe. You can buy good quality tomatoes at most supermarkets, Whole Foods and Trader Joes. Worst case, mix San Marzano canned tomatoes with other tomatoes.

Directions:

In a medium sauce pan, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic and red crushed pepper (optional). Cook onion and garlic until they begin to soften. Add the carrot, celery and a pinch of salt and cook further until very soft. The salt will help the vegetables to soften more quickly. Add the thyme before the mixture is completely softened.

Add the 2 cans of peeled whole tomatoes crushing them with your hand as you add them. Break any tomatoes that you didn't crush with the back of a wooden spoon. Bring to boil and then lower to simmer. Cook for about 30 minutes with the lid tilted on the pot until sauce is the consistency of hot cereal.

Season with additional salt and pepper to your taste. Taste the sauce often to cook to your desired consistency. The sauce should be thick and chunky, not watery and runny. When near completion, add some chopped basil for additional taste (optional).

Family Secrets:

- Sugar – people like to add sugar to balance the acid from the tomatoes. Carrots should provide the same effect but a pinch of sugar is worth a try.
- Red wine – Although red wine adds to the acidity of sauce it also adds a depth of flavor.
- Red or sweet onions – try substituting sweet Maui onions or red onions. This will change the taste adding more sweetness with the Maui's and more acidity with the red onions. Have fun experimenting.
- Pepperoni – Add a 1-inch long whole chunk of pepperoni to sauce right after the tomatoes to give it some additional taste.
- Parsley – Add parsley towards the end of the 30 minute cooking period to give the sauce a little “green” taste.
- Marinara Sauce (Sauce that has been removed of all tomato solids, seeds, skins and remaining vegetables) – after cooking, let cool and run through a food mill to remove all seeds and other solids. (You need to use a food mill for this. A strainer will not work).
- Cook, cook, cook – True or not, Italian grandmothers like to cook their sauce for hours and hours or even days. If you are cooking with meat in the sauce, this makes more sense.

Carciofi Gratinati

Baked Artichokes

Artichokes, lemons, capers and mint are ingredients found all over Sicily. Sicilian artichokes, often called *spinelli* (spiny), are small with spiny points. Capers are found growing wild in Sicily. But the best capers in Sicily and perhaps the world are found on the tiny island of Pantelleria. Pantelleria is 62 miles southwest of Sicily and just 43 miles east of the Tunisian coast. Capers and mint are another traditional Sicilian flavor combination.



Recipe for 6.

Ingredients and equipment:

- 10 small artichokes (baby artichokes if you can find them)
- 1 lemon
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup olive oil
- 3 garlic cloves
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of black un-pitted Sicilian olives (see below how to un-pit)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup capers, rinsed and drained
- 6 tablespoons finely chopped mint
- 3 tablespoons fresh breadcrumbs

Note: The olives and the capers will add a lot of salt to this dish. Be careful not to add too much additional salt to taste.

Note: Pitting an olive is easy. On a cutting board, use a chef's knife and roll the olive between the knife and cutting board and press down. This will release the pit.

Note: An alternative to the lemon-water bath described below is to rub the exposed surfaces of the artichokes with lemon. This will avoid the water spattering in the oil but is more labor intensive.

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 375° degrees.

Fill a large bowl with water and add the juice of the lemon to the bowl. This bowl will be used to hold the artichokes after you clear each one to minimize their oxidization (discoloration and turning brown).

Clean each artichoke as follows:

- Break off the green outer leaves until you reach the yellow soft layer of the artichoke
- Using a pairing knife, trim the thick green skin from the bottom and stem of the

artichoke

- Using a bread knife, cut the top 1/3rd of the artichoke off
- Slice the artichoke in ½ or in ¼ depending on the size
- If not using baby artichokes, use a pairing knife, grapefruit knife or lemon baller to remove the choke
- Plunge into the lemon water bath

Heat the olive oil in large sauté pan over medium heat. Add the whole garlic cloves, sauté until browned. Remove and discard.

Remove the artichokes from the lemon water. Pat dry with a paper towel as best you can and add to the heated oil olive. The olive will spatter when the water hits it so be careful. Cover and cook over medium heat for 15 to 20 minutes, occasionally stirring, until the artichokes are tender. Be careful not to over brown the artichokes. Lower the heat if needed.

De-pit the olives and roughly chop and add to the artichokes. Add the capers and the mint and combine the ingredients well. Salt and pepper to taste.

Place in a lightly oiled baking dish and sprinkle the bread crumbs over it.

Bake for 20 to 30 minutes or until the breadcrumbs are golden brown.

Serve either hot or at room temperature.

An Illustrated Guide to Preparing Artichokes:



1) Start by filling a bowl with cold water and squeezing the juice of a lemon into it. This will serve as a bath for for the artichokes during the preparation period. Acid in the form of lemon (you could use a dash of white vinegar instead) will slow the formation of phenolics which are quick to cause browning on the surface of the vegetable when it is cut

and exposed to air. The water will also reduce the artichoke's exposure to oxygen and help slow the discolouration.

In addition, have a halved lemon at the ready before you start work on the artichoke. You will be using this lemon to rub over cut surfaces at every turn. Also make sure your equipment (knives and saucepan are made from a non-reactive substance such as stainless steel)



2) Begin work on the artichoke by pulling out the tough, outer, dark green leaves.



3) Continue removing leaves until you are left with just light colored, tender leaves in the center. Immediately rub the newly exposed surfaces with juice from the halved lemon.



4) Slice off the top one inch of the leaves.



5) Trim the stalk - but not too far. The stalk is actually a continuation of the heart and it tastes good, so make sure not too much of it goes to waste. Again, rub cut surfaces with lemon.



6) Using a small pairing knife, trim the remaining dark green surfaces at the base of the artichoke, including the stalk. Continue to rub with lemon as you work.



7) At this stage your artichoke should look nice and neat like this.



8) Next stage is to cut the artichoke in half. Rub the edges with that lemon juice again - it really does help slow the browning process.



9) The choke - hairy fibers in the center of the artichoke - all need to be removed in a large artichoke like this one. Use a grapefruit spoon which has a serrated edge and makes the job slightly easier. If you don't have one a regular teaspoon will work too. Use the tip of the spoon to gouge out all of the hairs.



10) Pull out all of the tough red leaves in the center, leaving the soft green leaves in place. Rub those surfaces with lemon again!



11) Your artichoke is now prepped. Leave the halves in the water bath while you tackle the other artichokes. Just before cooking, Cut the artichokes lengthwise into sizes that suit your recipe and rub with lemon again.

Insalata di Arancie, Finocchi, ed Olive Nere

Orange, Fennel, and Black Olive Salad

In Sicily, oranges and olives are grown everywhere. This salad which also uses fennel, blends together very well and is a great example of the Sicilian pairing of “sweet and sour”.

Recipe for 4.

Ingredients and equipment:

- 2 male fennel bulbs (see Note)
- 3 oranges (blood oranges if you can find them)
- ¼ cup of black un-pitted Sicilian olives (see below how to un-pit)
- Olive oil
- Parsley
- Red-wine vinegar
- Salt and pepper

Note: There are two types of fennel bulbs: male and female. The male bulbs are more rounded where the female bulbs are smaller and shaped like a flat oval.

Note: Pitting an olive is easy. On a cutting board, use a chef's knife and roll the olive between the knife and cutting board and press down. This will release the pit.

Directions:

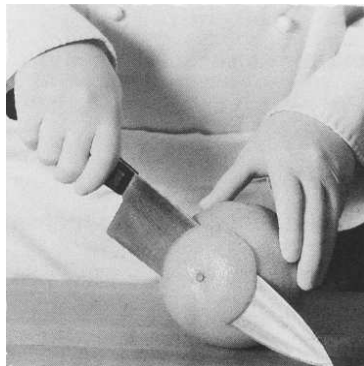
Remove the fronds and the green part from the fennel bulbs. Thinly slice the fennel bulbs and place in a bowl. Coarsely chop the fennel fronds and set aside.

After removing pits, chop the olives into very rough pieces and place in a bowl.

Remove the peel from the oranges as shown below. Then slice the oranges into slices and remove any seeds.

On a serving plate or individual plates, arrange the oranges slices. Then top the oranges with a small pile of sliced fennel and then top with the olives.

Sprinkle with a small amount of parsley and the fennel fronds and drizzle with olive oil and a splash of red-wine vinegar. Add salt and pepper to taste.



Amaretti

Almond Cookies

These cookies are very popular in Italian and Greek bakeries. Almonds are another ingredient brought to Sicily by the Arabs. Serve these with coffee, a “digestivo” or some ice cream or granita.

Recipe for 3 dozen cookies. Don't make them too big.

Ingredients and equipment:

- 16 ounces whole unblanched almonds
- 2 1/4 cups powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 4 large egg whites at room temperature
- Sliced almonds
- Powdered sugar
- Silpats or parchment paper and cookie sheets
- Cooling rack

Note: Powdered sugar is the same as Confectioner's sugar.

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350F. Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper or a Silpat.

In a food processor, finely chop the whole almonds to the point they resemble a flour.

In a large bowl, mix together the powdered sugar and baking powder. Add the finely chopped almonds and mix together well.

In a large bowl using a hand mixer or in a standing mixer, beat the egg whites until stiff peaks form. With a rubber spatula, gently fold the egg whites into the almond mixture a little at a time. Gently mix until the entire mixture is wet.

Using two soup spoons, scoop out the mixture into balls and place on the parchment or Silpat lined sheet. Top them with sliced almonds. Dust with powdered sugar through a sieve and bake for about 10 to 12 minutes, watching them closely at the end of the baking time. You can cook them longer if you prefer a golden brown crisp cookie.

Let the cookies cool until they can be removed to a cooling rack. Store in an airtight container.

Italian Cooking Resources

Italian cooking ingredients

Bay Cities Italian Deli and Bakery
1517 Lincoln Blvd.
Santa Monica, CA 90401
310-395-8279

www.baycitiesitaliandeli.com
Tu-Sat 9-7P, Sun 9-6 Closed Mon
Olive oils, pasta, deli meats, cheeses and jarred vegetables. Great sandwiches if you dare lunch time (It's a zoo).

Guidi Marcello, LTD
1649 10th Street
Santa Monica, CA 90404
310-452-6277

www.guidimarcello.com
M-F
This wholesale store front is in an industrial strip in Santa Monica along the 10 Fwy. They freely sell retail and prefer cash. Good for canned tomatoes, olive oils, cheeses, olives and meats.

Mario's Italian Deli & Market
740 E. Broadway
Glendale, CA
818-242-4114
mariosdeli.com
A watered down version of Bay Cities. If you're in the Glendale area, not bad.

Surfas (Chef's Paradise)
Corner of W. Washington and
National Blvd. Culver City, CA 9023
310-559-4770
www.surfasonline.com
M-F 9-6:30, Sun 11-5

These people have everything or can get it. Specifically for Italian food, dried beans, pasta, cheeses and meats.

Italian food magazines

Tastes of Italia
www.tastesofitalia.com
Basic cooking



La Cucuna Italiana
lacucinaitalianamag.com
Intermediate cooking



Italian cooking TV shows

Everyday Italian
Food Network
Beginning cooking

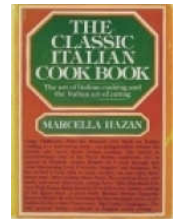


Molto Maria with
Mario Batali
Food Network
Intermediate cooking

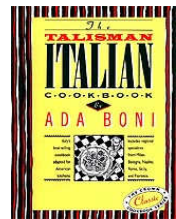


Famous Italian cookbooks

The Classic Italian Cookbook by
Marcella Hazan
Publisher: Knopf; 1st
Knopf edition (February
12, 1976)



The Talisman Italian Cookbook by
Ada Boni
Publisher: Crown
(December 13, 1950)



Fine Art of Italian Cooking by
Giuliano Bugiatti
Publisher: Clarkson
Potter; Expnd&Uptd
edition (February 24,
1990)

