# "Lent in Emilia-Romagna"

#### March 2009



Emilia-Romagna is known as Italy's heartland. Situated between Tuscany and La Marché on the south and Lomardy and the Veneto to the north, Emilia-Romagna is home to some of Italy's most famous brands. Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, Prosciutto di Parma, Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Modena (Balsamic vinegar) and Ferrari cars all call Emilia-Romagna home.

Lent in Emilia-Romagna is really a contradiction. The region is known as Italy's most rich and gluttonous region. The food of the region is the main reason to travel here.

Italy's most famous and storied cities are located in Emilia-Romagna. Bologna is home to several large universities and its name is given to perhaps the most famous ragù of Italy, Ragù Bolognese. Parma gives its name to Prosciutto di Parma and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. Modena is home to the regions registered Balsamic vinegar. The Italian government heavily regulates all three of these products to insure they meet strict quality and taste standards.

The name Emilia-Romagna has roots in the Ancient Roman legacy in these lands. Emilia refers to via Æmilia, an important Roman road connecting Rome to the northern part of Italy. Romagna is a corruption of Romània; when Ravenna was the capital of the Italian portion of the Byzantine Empire.

Emilia-Romagna is separated from Tuscany by a mountain range call the Appennini. This is also referred to as the "Olive oil line" because olive trees grow well south of these mountains but not to the north.

As a result, animal fats in the form of butter and lard are more frequently used in Emilia-Romagna. Perhaps most scary to the American eater is the product called Lardo. It's is a type of salume made by curing strips of pig fat with rosemary and other spices.

On our first trip to Emilia-Romagna, we arrived in Parma in the evening; well past the the traditional start of dinner at 8:30PM. We dashed to a restaurant which was more than happy to serve us, but we had to eat what they could serve. We delighted in the most wonderful plate of ravioli with melted Lardo as the sauce and sprinkled with Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. Heaven!

Parmigiano-Reggiano desires special attention. It is strictly bound to its place of origin. Both the production of milk and its transformation into cheese take place in the provinces of Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, Bologna to the west of the Reno River and Mantua to the east of the Po River. The exact boundary is shown below. See <a href="https://www.parmigiano-reggiano.it">www.parmigiano-reggiano.it</a> for more details.



One of the beauties of Emilia-Romagna is the simplicity of travel. All the major cities are along the same major highway (A1 and A14). Quick and efficient train service between these cities is really the best way to do day trips. Don't miss Piacenza, Parma, Reggio nell'Emilia and Bologna.



## Tonight's Menu

- Antipasti
  - Antipasti di Salumi (Platter of Cured Meats)
  - Spuma di Mortadella (Mouse of Mortadella) 2x
  - Cipolline sott'Aceto (Marinated Baby Onions)
- Technique
  - Pasta all'uovo fatta in casa (Homemade egg pasta)
- Zuppa
  - Cappelletti (Little Hats) 2x
- Primo
  - Strozzapreti (Priest chokers) 4x
  - Ragù Bolognese 2x
- Secondo
  - Scaloppine di Vitello a Basilico e Aceto Balsamico (Basil and Balsamic Veal Scallops) - 4x
  - Piselli con Prosciutto di Parma (Sweet Peas Parma) 3x
- Dolce
  - Fragole con Aceto Balsamico (Strawberries with Balsamic Vinegar) 4x

#### Check out our family blog:

ouritaliantable.wordpress.com

#### Web resources:

<u>www.acetobalsamicotradizionale.it/</u> - Homepage of the "Reggio Emilia Consorzio" <u>www.balsamico.it/</u> - Homepage of the "Modena Consorzio"

www.parmigiano-reggiano.it – Home page of Parmigiano-Reggiano

www.prosciuttodiparma.com/ - Homepage of "Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma"

### Spuma di Mortadella

#### Mortadella Mousse

Although thought of as French, mousses, pâtés and terrines of meat, poultry and seafood have been prepared for centuries all over Italy. Some Italian food authorities believe the technique originated on the peninsula of Italy, a point debated with zeal by the French. Perfect at an elegant dinner, it is delicious. Substitute other cooked hams, poultry or oil packed tuna or smoked salmon for the mortadella.

Recipe for 8 as an antipasto.

#### Ingredients and equipment:

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- ½ cup of poultry/meat stock
- ¾ cup heavy cream
- ¾ teaspoon plain gelatin soaked in 3 tablespoons of stock
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
- Freshly ground pepper to taste
- 8 ounces mortadella (get one thick piece at the deli)
- ½ cup finely minced onion (use a food processor for best results)
- Sliced bread for serving

<u>Note:</u> Prepare the mousse up to 24 hours ahead of serving. It must chill in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours. Remove the mousse from the refrigerator about 40 minutes before serving.

#### **Directions:**

Melt the butter in a small heavy saucepan over medium-low heat. Stir in the flour with a wooden spatula until smooth. Cook several minutes, until bubbly. Keeping the heat at medium-low, slowly stir in the stock and ¼ cup of cream with a wire whisk.

Stir until the mixture is smooth. Then whisk constantly 5 minutes or until the sauce is bubbling, thickened and all the raw flour taste has cooked away.

Throughly blend in the gelatin mixture and let simmer for 1 minute. Season with the nutmeg and pepper. Pour the sauce through a strainer into a bowl and cool to room temperature.

Roughly chop the mortadella and purée into a smooth paste using a food processor. Turn the purée out into a bowl and blend in the flour-gelatin mixture.

Using a stand or hand-held mixer, whip the remaining ½ cup of heavy cream. Using a spatula gently fold the whipped cream and the minced onion into the mortadella mixture.

Put the mixture into small crocks, cover and chill.

Lightly toast the bread slices just before serving. For serving the mousse, it should be lightly chilled but not ice cold. Serve the crocks along with sliced bread for serving as an antipasto.

# **Cipolline sott'Aceto**

### Marinated Baby Onions

Cipolline onions (those small wide flat onions) are another sign that Spring is on the way. This recipe uses inexpensive commercial Balsamic vinegar to create syrupy sauce. If you can't find Cipolline onions or don't want to pay the price, use small boiling onions. Serve as a side dish to meat or as an antipasto.

Recipe for 4 servings as a side dish, 8 servings as an antipasto.

#### Ingredients and equipment:

- 2 pounds small cipolline or boiling onions (about 1-½ inches each)
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 cup commercial-grade balsamic vinegar
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 cup water (if needed)

#### **Directions:**

Bring a large enameled cast iron pot of unsalted water to a boil. Meanwhile. cut a "cross" in the root end of each onion. Meanwhile, Add the onions and boil for 1 minute. Pour into a colander and rinse with cold water to stop the cooking process.

Once cool, use a knife and trim off the very top of the onion. Remove the skin from the onion, which slips away fairly easily. Wash your hands frequently as this will help with peeling the onions. (You can leave any tiny roots on the onions intact).

Add the olive oil to the large pot that was used to boil the onions. Bring the oil to almost smoking hot and add the butter. Stir the butter in the pot until it melts completely and the foam from the butter subsides. Add the drained onions and cook for about 10 minutes until golden brown all over. You will need to stir the onions frequently so they color on all sides. While browning, any skins that you failed to take off the onions will come loose. Use a pair of tongs to pick them out of the pan and discard.

Add the sugar, vinegar and rosemary to the pot. Cook the onions over a medium-low heat for about 10 to 15 minutes until nicely colored. If the mixture becomes dry, add \(^1/4\)-cup of water at a time to add liquid.

Once the onions are cooked, removed them to a serving dish with a slotted spoon. If necessary, boil the vinegar mixture down to create a syrup. Be careful not to burn. Sparingly spoon the syrup over the onions. A little goes a long way.

Serve hot as a side dish to a meat or allow to cool to room temperature and serve as an antipasto.

### Pasta all'uovo fatta in casa

### Homemade Egg Pasta

Hard pasta is factory-made with durum wheat flour and water. In homemade pasta, eggs take the place of water and hands take the place of machines. Although egg pasta is now produced in almost every Italian province, it is the specialty of Emilia-Romangna and without question the finest egg pasta in Italy. In Emilia-Romangna, they never add oil, water or salt to the pasta dough.

Recipe makes enough flat cut pasta for 3 to 4 people. Recipe will yield more for stuffed pasta.

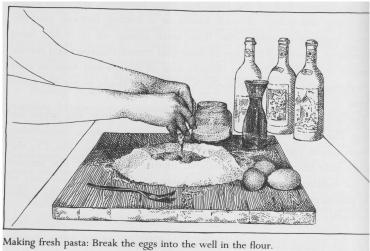
#### Ingredients and equipment:

- 2 eggs
- 1-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- Extra flour for kneading
- Clean large work surface for rolling dough
- A board scraper or flat-edged spatula

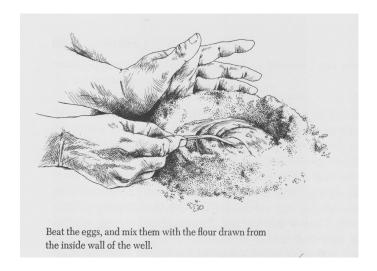
Note: As a general rule, use \(^3\)4 cup of flour with 1 egg. Humidity that day, moisture in the flour and the size of the egg will alter consistency of the dough. It's easier to add more flour to a wet dough than to try and add liquid to a dry dough.

#### **Directions:**

Pour out the flour onto the work surface and make a mound of the flour. With a fork, create a well in the middle of the mound. This mound will hold the eggs so make sure the sides are thick and tall enough to keep the eggs from escaping. Crack the eggs directly into the flour well.



With a fork begin to lightly beat the eggs until loosely combined. Again with the fork, begin to fold in the flour from the sides of the well. Continue until most of the flour has been mixed with the eggs and you have a loose mass on the work surface. At this point you probably have a pasta dough that is too wet and you'll need to slowly add flour.

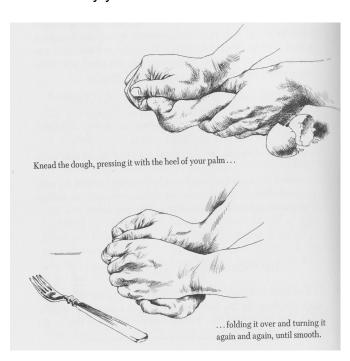


Using your hands, gather up the remaining flour on the board and mix with your hands. Add flour as needed to stiffen up the dough. It's impossible to explain when you have added the right amount of flour. You'll know when you get there but it would be rare to add more then 1 cup of flour per egg.

Set the dough to the side. Using the board scraper or flat-edged spatula, scrape all the caked on flour from the work surface. Wash and dry your hands.

Return the dough to the work surface and knead for about 8 to 10 minutes. Using the heal of your hand, fold the dough over and over from different directions. At the end of the kneading process you'll have a smooth, compact and elastic ball of dough.

Cut the dough ball into 4 pieces and flatten each piece into a thick disk. At this point, wrap each piece of dough in wax paper and place in refrigerator for up to 3 hours or use immediately.



# Cappelletti

# Little Hats Tortellini in Brodo

#### Tortellini in Broth

In Romagna, *cappelletti* in broth is the traditional dish for Christmas and New Year's Day. My family prepared it for New Year's Day and Sunday meals. Since this might mean the making of several hundred cappelletti, everyone would get involved: spouses, children and friends. For children this is the next best thing to playing in the mud. If you travel to Emila, these little pastas are called *Tortellini*.

The two basic ways to shape these pastas are starting off with a disk or a square (see the illustration below). The ones made from a disk will have a completely round shape. The ones made with a square will have little tails. Finally, the shape of the tortellini (or tortellino – singular) is widely thought to be a tribute to the navel of *Venus de Milo*.

Like so many things in Italy, there is no one standard recipe for the filling. It is usually a combination of chicken and pork. Sometimes ricotta cheese is added and sometimes you'll see Mortadella instead of the Prosciutto. Have fun playing around with combinations.

Recipe for 8 to 10; about 100 individual cappelletti.

#### Ingredients and equipment:

#### Filling

- 6 ounces roasted pork loin or pork tenderloin
- 6 ounces roasted chicken; all skin, fat and bones removed after cooking
- 4 ounces sliced Prosciutto di Parma
- 1 egg
- ¼ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Zest of 1 lemon or 1/8 teaspoon nutmeg (optional See Note)

#### Pasta and broth

- 2 batches of Homemade Egg Pasta Dough
- 5 guarts of Chicken or Beef stock (or a mixture)
- About 2 cups of grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese for passing
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Pasta machine

<u>Note</u>: The use of nutmeg or lemon is very regional. Nutmeg borrows from the Veneto (Venice) region to the north and lemon borrows from the Le Marchè region to the south.

#### **Directions:**

<u>Making the filling:</u> In a food processor with a steal blade, individually chop (not too fine) the chicken, pork and Prosciutto di Parma and move to a separate bowl to combine. Add the egg, cheese, salt and pepper and the optional lemon zest <u>or</u> nutmeg. With one hand mix the ingredients well. The mixture should not be homogeneous, but instead you should be able to still see the individual ingredients. Cover and refrigerate until ready for use.

<u>Shaping the pasta:</u> Using a pasta machine, roll out the *Homemade Egg Pasta Dough* into long thin strips. The dough should be thin enough so you can barely see the filling through it but not so thin that the dough easily tears (#5 on a KitchenAid Stand Mixer pasta attachment). Spoon a scant amount of filling spaced 2 inches apart on the rolled out pasta. A little goes a long way. Then the cut the pasta between the mounds of filling with a knife or cut out a circle with a thinly rimmed glass or biscuit cutter.

Fold as shown in one of the two illustrations below.

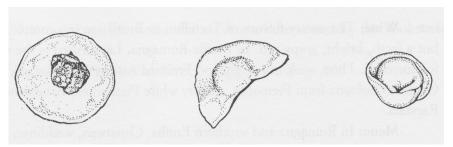


Illustration 1: Starting with a disk

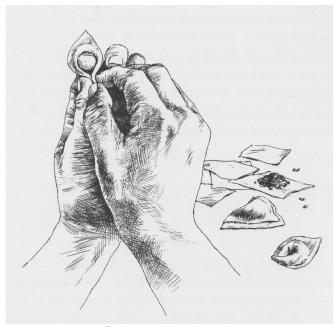


Illustration 2: Starting with a square

At this point, lay the cappelletti onto trays lined with wax paper or a Silpat and place in the refrigerator. After about 30 minutes, turn the cappelletti over so they do not get soggy on the bottom. Alternatively, place the trays in the freezer and freeze the cappelletti. Once frozen solid, move to a resealable plastic bag for storage up to 3 months.

In a large stock pot, bring the stock to a full boil. Add salt and pepper to taste. Remember, the Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese will add some saltiness so don't over do the salt. Add the cappelletti, either refrigerated or frozen, to the broth being careful not to splash the hot broth on yourself. Return the stock to a gentle boil and cook until the cappelletti begin to float to the top. At this point, it's all about tasting them. Sample a cappelletto. They should be cooked through but still have a little bite to them.

Using a slotted spoon or similar tool, remove the cappelletti to individual bowls and laddle the broth over them. Serving in this manner helps you to put the same amount of cappelletti and broth in each bowl.

Serve with the passed Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese.

### Strozzapreti

#### Priest chokers

Many stories exist for the name "Strozzapreti". One is that gluttonous priests (presumably not Episcopal) were so enthralled by the savory pasta that they ate too quickly and choked themselves, sometimes to death. Another legend goes that wives would customarily make the pasta for churchmen as partial payment for land rents (In Romagna, the Roman Catholic Church had extensive land properties rented to farmers), and their husbands would be angered enough by the venal priests eating their wives' food to wish the priests would choke as they stuffed their mouths with it.

Recipe for 3 to 4 people.

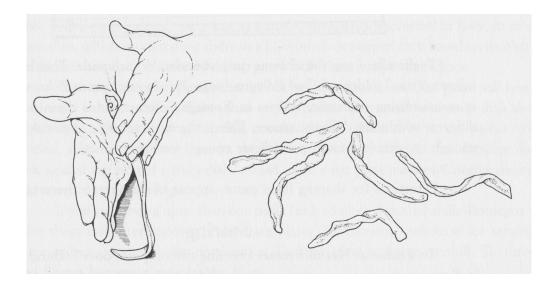
#### Ingredients and equipment:

- 1 batch Homemade Egg Pasta dough
- Sheet pan and a silpat

#### **Directions:**

Strozzapreti pasta looks like twisted strands of tagliatelle. Roll the pasta out but a bit thicker then usual (middle setting on a pasta machine; #4 on a KitchenAid Stand Mixer Pasta attachment). Cut the pasta into strips about 3/8 inches wide. Gently hold the top of a long strip of pasta between your palms. Slide your palms past each other, allowing the pasta to coil in the opposite direction. Pinch off that portion and move down the strand (or you can cut the pasta in shorter lengths to begin with).

Repeat the movement for each piece of pasta until you've completed them all. Strozzapreti are never perfectly neat. That's part of the fun. Spread them on a Silpat or a dish towel-lined tray. Refrigerate until ready for use the same day.



# Ragù Bolognese

### Ragù

Bologna's ragù is the most famous pasta accompaniment in Italy. It is a meat-based sauce that originates from Bologna. The ragù, unlike other Italian sauces, uses very little tomato.

The people of Bologna traditionally serve their famous ragù with freshly made tagliatelle (tagliatelle alla bolognese) and their traditionally green lasagne. Less traditionally, the sauce is served with hard durum wheat pastas.

There are three essential points you must remember to make successful Ragú Bolognese. These points are greatly debated, but having tried different recipes, these work the best:

- 1. The meat must be sautéed just barely long enough to lose its raw color. It must <u>not</u> brown or become crusty or it will lose its delicacy.
- 2. It must be cooked in milk before the tomatoes are added. This keeps the meat creamier and sweeter tasting.
- 3. It must cook at the merest simmer for a long, long, long time. The minimum is 3½ hours. 5 hours is better.

The union between fresh pasta and ragù is a marriage made in heaven!

Recipe for 3-to-4 cups of sauce; enough for 6-to-8 people with pasta.

#### Ingredients and equipment:

- ½ cup finely chopped yellow onion
- 6 tablespoons olive oil
- 6 tablespoons butter
- ½ cup finely chopped celery
- ¼ cup finely chopped carrots
- 1 ½ pounds ground lean beef, chuck or shoulder
- Salt and pepper
- 2 cups dry white wine
- 1 cup of milk
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- 4 cups canned Italian San Marzano tomatoes, roughly chopped or crushed with your hands along with their juices

<u>Note:</u> Don't get too crazy about chopping the vegetables. Most traditional ragù recipes use very finely chopped vegetables most easily done in a food processor. A thicker dice achieved with a knife is a great variation to try.

#### **Directions:**

Use a heavy, enameled cast-iron pot with tall sides for cooking slowly and reducing the ragù. With the pot over a medium heat, put the chopped onions along with the oil and butter. Sauté briefly until the onion is translucent. Add the celery and carrot and cook

on medium for 2 minutes.

Add the ground beef, crumbling it into the pot. Break up the meat with a wooden spoon. Add 2 teaspoons of salt and stir and cook until the meat has lost its raw, red color. Add the wine, turn the heat up to medium high heat and cook, stirring occasionally until all the wine has evaporated.

Turn the heat down to medium, add the milk and the nutmeg and cook until the milk has evaporated. Stir frequently.

When the milk has evaporated, add the tomatoes and stir thoroughly. When the tomatoes have started to bubble, turn the heat down until the sauce cooks at a lazy simmer (the lowest range heat setting), just yielding an occasional bubble. Cook, partially covered, for a minimum of  $3 \frac{1}{2}$  to 4 hours, stirring occasionally.

Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Ragù can be kept in the refrigerator for up to 5 days. Reheat until simmers for about 15 minutes before serving.

Suggested Accompaniments:

Tagliatelle with Ragù Bolognese

# Scaloppine di Vitello a Basilico e Aceto Balsamico

### Basil and Balsamic Veal Scallops

Fresh basil and balsamic vinegar are an unbeatable seasoning for a sauté of veal, pork, or seafood. Make it for a quick supper or for a menu when you need a fast-cooking main dish.

Recipe for 4.

#### Ingredients and equipment:

- 4 pieces veal scaloppine (about 1 pound)
- About 1 cup of flour
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 teaspoons artisan-made balsamic vinegar
- · 3 tablespoons minced fresh basil
- ½ cup chicken stock
- 1 tablespoon shredded basil

Note: For this recipe, dried basil cannot be substituted for fresh basil.

#### **Directions:**

Pound each piece of veal with a meat mallet until the pieces are about ½ inch thick. Spread the flour on a flat plate to prepare for dredging the meat.

Heat the olive oil and butter in a skillet over medium-high heat. Working with one piece of veal at a time, dredge the veal in the flour, covering it on both sides and shake off the excess. Quickly sauté the veal in the skillet until brown, about 20 to 30 seconds per side. Be careful to not over crowd the pan with too many pieces of veal as this will cause the pan temperature to drop too low and stop the cooking.

Transfer the veal pieces to a platter as completed and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Sauté the remaining veal pieces and transfer to the plate. Keep warm in the oven.

Stir half the balsamic vinegar and the 3 tablespoons minced fresh basil in the sauté pan. Cook over a low heat for a few seconds and stir in the chicken stock. Raise the heat and cook at a lively boil for 1 minute. Pour the sauce over the warm veal.

Sprinkle the remaining balsamic vinegar over the veal and sprinkle with the shredded basil. Serve immediately.

### Piselli con Prosciutto di Parma

#### Sweet Peas Parma

This is an old and much loved springtime dish from Parma. Freshly picked peas are best but frozen tiny peas substitute successfully when fresh ones are unavailable. Serve the peas as a side dish with roasted or grilled main dishes.

Recipe for 6 to 8 as a side dish.

#### Ingredients and equipment:

- 1 pound shelled sweet peas or 1 pound frozen tiny peas, defrosted by rinsing in a colander
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 glove of garlic
- 2 ounces Prosciutto di Parma
- 3 tablespoons crushed canned tomatoes
- Salt and pepper to taste

#### **Directions:**

If using fresh peas, steam 4 to 8 minutes or until lightly cooked. When finished, rinse cold water to stop the cooking. If using frozen peas, rinse under cold water in a colander to defrost.

Heat the butter and olive oil over a medium heat. Lightly smash the garlic clove using a knife blade and your fist. Add the garlic to the butter and olive olive and swirl around. Once the garlic is golden brown, discard it. Don't let the garlic burn or you'll have a bitter taste. If you do burn the garlic, start over.

Coarsely chop the Prosciutto di Parma and add to the simmering butter and olive oil. Sauté for about 2 to 3 minutes until the pink color turns lightly brown. Make sure the tomatoes are well crushed with your hand and add to the pan. Cook until the mixture is thick; just a few minutes.

Add the peas and cook over medium heat until warmed through stirring frequently. Season with salt and pepper and serve as a side dish. Don't season earlier because the Prosciutto di Parma will add some salt.

## Fragole con Aceto Balsamico

### Strawberries with Balsamic Vinegar

This is not an Italian recipe but a recipe that shows off the sweetness of Balsamic vinegar. The simplicity of good quality strawberries mixed with Balsamic vinegar is a perfect mix. This recipe also shows why Balsamic vinegar is a terrible choice to replace our favorite, "Red wine vinegar".

Recipe for 4.

#### Ingredients and equipment:

- 1 pint strawberries, hulled and halved
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon artisan-made balsamic vinegar

#### **Directions:**

Toss strawberries with sugar and vinegar in bowl. Let stand 20 minutes. Serve alone or with whipped cream with a dash of vanilla.

# 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 10<sup>th</sup> Street Santa Monica, CA 90404 310-452-6277 www.quidimarcello.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 Bugialli Publisher: Clarkson Potter; Expnd&Uptd edition (February 24, 1990)