



THE FOURWOOD

Independent Lifestyle Publication

TUSCOOKANY | Travel & Learn to Cook

in FOOD THERAPY

TUSCOOKANY is a great concept that combines two of the most sought after human pleasures: travelling and food. Here, it is more precisely about learning to cook, as well – authentic Italian dishes from the savviest and most passionate of local chefs: Paola Baccetti, Franco Palandra, and Laura Giusti. In some of the most scenic venues that la bella Toscana abounds in stand the three villas – Casa Ombuto, Torre del Tartufo, Bellorcia –, where you can experience a delightfully multifaceted vacation during which, while you enjoy the splendid natural surroundings, explore towns and areas boasting history, culture, art, gastronomy, you also learn how to cook Italian-style in well-equipped kitchens, make your own pizzas al forno, savour delish, earthy meals in cantinas or marvellous table settings outdoors. Each of the locations has its unique, distinct features that coagulate around traditional design and style, which adds to the authenticity of the entire experience. Everything is designed to give you that feeling of being in an Italian family, where sharing meals and conviviality are of utmost importance and, as stated in the title of the essay below, form the very pillar of

the legendary Italian sociability. A splendid cookbook – collecting 80 traditional recipes and the entire energy of Tuscany in illustrative photographs – was recently published. The last paragraph of its introduction sums up what this special cuisine is all about: “Tuscan cuisine can be simple and refined, or aristocratic and rustic, but it is always genuine and tasty, and that also applies to its delicious sweets, where memories of the past often echo, of those Middle Ages when Florence and Tuscany really were at the center of world affairs.”

Cooking and eating together remain an irreplaceable pillar of the Italian sociability

In Italy, gastronomy is almost philosophy ... and much more than that. It is pleasure and sociability: the perfect moment to talk, share a laugh and strengthen relationships. As a matter of fact, the importance of food, home cooking and eating together within the Italian culture has been scientifically proven.

Deborah Cameron, a world-renowned professor of English who teaches at the University of Oxford, and Don Kulick, a professor of Anthropology who works at the New York University, wrote about the subject in their outstanding book *Language and Sexuality* (2006, published by Cambridge University Press). The authors claim that food taste is actively socialized at dinner, and compare an American and an Italian family to explain their point. While some American family frames dessert as desirable, especially for children, and labels the rest of the dinner

as mere nutrition and, sometimes (think about broccoli or brussels sprouts), even as some kind of punishment, Italian families talk about food and dinner as pure pleasure. For an Italian family, the dessert is not the great prize after a painful duty, but the cathartic moment that comes through an extremely exciting social and cultural journey.

It is something you can find in the way Italians talk about food, and the people who cook food. For an Italian child, food means family and parents, it is a comforting blanket that wraps everything with its delicate warmth. Eating together with his mum and dad a home-cooked meal, a little Italian gains the sense of stability and love he needs to grow up and be happy. The mother is usually the one who cooks, and this is another important aspect of this moment of sharing. She spends a lot of time choosing and preparing the right ingredients, those that make a house smell like home, an aroma that – if you are lucky enough to embrace it with all your senses when you are a child – will stay with you for the rest of your life.

The classic Italian mum owns the kitchen, a personal universe where she spends hours and hours, sometimes with grandma. She knows the right recipe for a cold day, when the family needs a ray of sunshine and the warm touch of a homemade dinner. She is perfectly aware of the ingredients you need to fight against a bad cold, and she is ready to cook them for you. And, of course, Italian mums are the best in the world when a special day comes around: desserts, traditional recipes... you name it. Considering all this, it seems quite natural that, for an Italian, nothing is better or more comforting than

whatever mum cooks.

While people around the world, especially some people in England and North America, develop family traditions based on “home delivery” or “eating out”, home-cooked meals shared with the rest of the family remain a sacred, irreplaceable event in Italy. The person who cooks waits for the sincere comments of the rest of the family, looking at every expression, waiting patiently to understand whether or not the recipe hit the right spot. All this happens very slowly, while the different courses enter the room following an ancient rhythm carefully directed by the chef of the house. Flavors meet softly, mirroring the traditional combinations of the particular region where the family lives, adding a special cultural twist to a very intimate moment: a ritual passed from generation to generation, from mother to daughter, like an old esoteric ceremony.

Even a “moment with your friends” translates almost automatically in “dinner” in the Italian vocabulary, because eating together and sharing food are both metaphorical and practical expressions of commitment. Around the table, conviviality grows and relationships achieve their highest peaks. Eating together is a magical moment through which the beautiful reaches the sublime, and friendship turns into a rare form of intimacy.

The fact that in Italy women are those who traditionally cook can sometimes be

misleading: men have always had their roles in the Italian culinary landscapes and rituals. In the past, men were those who gathered the food, butchered the animals, turned milk into the most amazing cheese. Even today, Italian men are usually those who are in charge of buying the right cold cuts, the perfect wine or the liquor needed to complete the dessert. Plus, especially in younger Italian families, men often cook as well, replicating what they learned from their mothers. However, even if the traditional dynamics that have characterized Italian families for centuries are changing, cooking and eating together remain an irreplaceable pillar of the Italian sociability.

It doesn't matter if the members of the family live at a different pace, have different routines and do different things: Italians eat together, sitting around the kitchen table, every day, no matter what. And then, on Sunday, grandpa and grandma, daughters and sons, father and mother: the big family, all together. You could think about Christmas dinner as an example of the perfect Italian-style Sunday *convivio*. Different generations merge and embrace in front of the most delicious dishes you can imagine. The grownups enjoy some local wine, grandpa tells a story, the children laugh and grandma helps mum with the second course. Then the dessert, the coffee and the liquor. Maybe a friend comes around, or the uncle who lives on the other side of town, riding his bicycle. People talk about what happened during the week, how they feel. Everything is familiar and warm. A ritual that goes on and on, year after year. A beautiful celebration of life itself.

Text: **TUSCOOKANY** Team

Photos: **Tuscookany**

TUSCOOKANY RECIPES

Pasta dough

Serving Size: 6

Ingredients:

- 4 Tbs olive oil
- 4 eggs
- 500 g flour

Directions:

1. Sieve the flour onto a working surface and make a hole in the centre.
2. Place the eggs in the hole and pour in the oil.
3. Beat the eggs and oil together with a fork, mixing in the flour gradually while doing this.
4. Once all the flour has been incorporated knead the dough.
5. Cut the dough in half and make two medium sized balls.
6. Let the pastry stand for about an hour covered with a dry cloth.
7. Use a rolling pin to roll it out thinly
8. Make squares and cut them.

Ravioli

Ingredients:

- 500 g pasta dough – *see recipe above*

Stuffing

- 400 g ricotta cheese
- 600 g spinach
- 50 parmesan cheese
- 2 eggs
- nutmeg
- salt and pepper

Directions:

1. Prepare normal pasta dough with the flour, eggs, a little water and a pinch of salt.
2. Whilst the ball of dough, wrapped in plastic wrap, is left to stand for a few minutes in a cool place, prepare the stuffing.
3. Boil the spinach in the little water left on the leaves after rinsing. Drain well and chop very finely, then add the ricotta, Parmesan and the eggs. Add salt, pepper, season with nutmeg and stir well to obtain a smooth, dense mixture.
4. Roll the pasta dough on a floured surface (either with a rolling pin or with the machine) until extremely thin. Place teaspoonfuls of filling on the dough every 5 cm until half the sheet is filled.
5. Fold the empty half over the filled half and gently but firmly push down between the spoonfuls of filling, sealing the pasta and ensuring that no air is trapped.
6. Cut ravioli with a fluted pastry wheel into squares of about 6 cm.
7. Cook in plenty of salted water, drain with a perforated spoon and serve in a large hot bowl with melted butter (this can be flavoured with sage – *see recipe below*) and parmesan cheese.

8. Before serving, leave to stand for a few minutes.

Butter and Sage Sauce

Ingredients:

- 2 Tbs butter
- 3 fresh sage leaves
- 1 handful parmesan cheese (freshly grated)
- 1 ladle boiling pasta water
- ravioli (8 pieces per portion – see recipe above)

Directions:

1. Melt the butter in a frying pan and add the cut sage and fry until it starts popping.
2. Add a ladle of boiling pasta water and then take it off the heat.
3. Add the pepper.
4. Cook the ravioli, drain and add it to the sauce pan and toss.
5. Allow for 8 pieces of ravioli per person.
6. Finally add the parmesan cheese.

Notes:

[Cooking Tip] Make sure only to add the pasta and cheese after the sauce is removed from the heat to prevent the ravioli breaking and the cheese getting lumpy.

[Cooking Tip] Variation with truffle: Prepare exactly same way but instead of sage use truffle paste or sauce.

Bruschetta with Porcini Mushrooms

Ingredients:

- 250 g porcini mushrooms
- olive oil
- 1 tsp garlic oil (garlic marinated in olive oil)
- 1 glass white wine
- 1 Tbs parsley
- salt
- pepper
- white bread

Directions:

1. Roughly chop the mushrooms and chop the parsley.
2. Heat the oil in a frying pan and add one teaspoon of the garlic oil.
3. Add mushrooms, parsley, salt and pepper and fry for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Add white wine and when this has evaporated, the sauce is ready.
5. Slice the bread in small hand sized shapes and either roast or grill.
6. Place the fried mushroom on top of the roasted bread and serve.

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