

Italian/Mediterranean Recipes

The twenty regions of Italy all offer a delicious range of dishes and the cuisine consists of far more than pasta and pizzas. The popularity of Italy as a holiday destination and the fact that so many Italian people now live in this country has had a strong influence on our love of their food.

Minestrone soup – [V]

This makes a delicious healthy complete meal for lunch or a light supper.

Serves 4

2 carrots, finely diced
1 onion, finely diced
2 celery sticks, finely diced
1 large potato, diced
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tbsp olive oil
2 tbsp tomato purée
1 litre vegetable stock
200g chopped tomatoes (½ a can)
200g cannellini beans (½ a can)
70g spaghetti, in short pieces
¼ of a savoy cabbage, finely shredded
Chopped fresh oregano
Grated parmesan

Heat the olive oil in a large pan, then add all the vegetables and the garlic. Sauté for around 5 minutes, until softened. Then stir in the tomato purée, stock and tomatoes. Bring to a simmer, then add the spaghetti and beans. Cook for 5 minutes then add the cabbage and cook for a further 5 minutes, with a lid on at all times.

To finish stir in the fresh oregano, ladle into a bowl and top with the parmesan cheese; add fresh ground black pepper if desired.

Tortellini with Ricotta and Pancetta

We often include pasta making in our sessions and this makes a delicious alternative to other pasta dishes. Leave out the pancetta for vegetarian and possibly include cooked and drained spinach.

Serves 4

For the pasta dough:

300g '00' flour
3 whole eggs, well beaten
Pinch of salt

Place the flour and salt in a large bowl and make a well in the centre. Add the eggs and bring the mixture together. When it is formed into a dough turn on to a floured surface and knead for 5 - 10 minutes.

Wrap in clingfilm and allow to rest for 20 - 30 minutes.

For the filling:

200g ricotta cheese

75g pancetta, in small dice

20 basil leaves, shredded

6 sun blush tomatoes, in small pieces

Black pepper

Mix all the ingredients together.

For the tortellini:

Divide the dough into two pieces. Set up a pasta machine and put it on its widest setting. Pass the dough through several times. Reduce the width and continue this process until the pasta is almost see-through.

Repeat for the second piece.

Using a pastry cutter, cut out large circles.

Brush the edge of these circles with a little water, then add a tsp of filling. Shape into a tortellini, then cook in a large pan of simmering water for 5 minutes, until cooked through.

Risotto Primavera (spring vegetable risotto) - [V]

Serves 4

2 shallots, finely diced

2 spring onions, cut into diagonal slices

1 garlic clove, finely diced

700ml vegetable stock

olive oil

175g Arborio Rice

40g butter

125g asparagus spears, each in 4 diagonal cut pieces

70g peas

100g broad beans, peeled
50g parmesan, grated

Heat the oil and half the butter in a large pan. Add the shallots, spring onions and garlic. Cook gently for 3-4 minutes. Put the stock in a separate pan and bring to a simmer.

Add the rice to the pan with the onion mix in it. Stir continuously for 2 minutes. Start adding the stock a ladleful at a time, stirring well with each addition. The risotto should be barely simmering to allow full absorption of the liquid.

Continue this for around 15 minutes. After this time add the peas and beans to the risotto mix, and place the asparagus in the remaining stock to cook for 4 minutes, then add to the rice.

Check the rice to see if it is done - all the stock may not need to be added. When the rice is done (*al dente*) remove from the heat and stir in the parmesan and remaining butter. Allow to rest for 1 minute, then serve.

Serve with a rocket, tomato and parmesan salad.

Fried Red Mullet with Sweet and Sour Red Onions

Red Mullet is a very popular fish and is caught in Mediterranean and Atlantic waters

For the sweet and sour sauce:

50ml extra virgin olive oil
2 medium red onions, halved and thinly sliced
2 tbsp red wine vinegar
2 tbsp clear honey
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the fish:

Olive oil for shallow frying
8 fillets of red mullet
50g plain flour
1 tsp small capers, to garnish
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

To cook the sweet and sour red onions:

Heat the oil in a frying pan. Add the onions, vinegar, honey, ½ tsp salt and some pepper. Cook gently for 10 minutes, stirring every now and then, until they are soft but still with a little bite, do not let them brown. Keep warm.

Pour the olive oil into a wide shallow pan to a depth of 1cm and heat to around 180C. Season the fish fillets on both sides with salt and pepper and then coat them in the plain flour and knock off excess. Lower the heat slightly under the pan, add the fish fillets and cook them for 1 minute on each side until lightly golden and cooked through. Lift on to kitchen paper and drain briefly.

Overlap 2 fish fillets in the centre of each warmed plate and spoon over some of the sweet and sour onions. Scatter with the capers and serve. Or arrange in pairs on a single serving dish before spooning over the onions and capers.

Mediterranean Fish Stew

Serves 4

1 yellow pepper, deseeded and chopped
1 bulb of fennel, chopped
400g can chopped tomatoes
4 fresh tomatoes, roughly chopped
50g pitted black olives, halved
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 tsp Mediterranean seasoning
200ml vegetable stock
1 bunch salad onions, cut into 1cm slices
260g pack cod fillets, cut into chunks
200g Salmon fillets, cut into chunks
Handful of fresh basil from a large pot, roughly torn

Heat a little oil in a large pan. Add the peppers and fennel. Place the canned and fresh tomatoes in with the olives, garlic, Mediterranean seasoning and stock. Bring to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Add the salad onions, then cook for a further 3 minutes.

Add the fish and cook, covered, for 1-2 minutes until just cooked through, then season and add the basil. Serve with crusty bread.