

2016 Les Dames SF Ancestral Potluck Recipies

Jerry Di Vecchio

Every year I repeat, my mother was not much of a cook as other activities appealed so much more--like stripping and redoing furniture; whipping out curtains, dresses, doll clothes; and "running around" which meant local trips, wild foods foraging, great picnics and ever so much more.

Her basic cookbook came from of her high school home economics class, and naturally, in those days, making white sauce was a required proof of passage..

When I was a child, the milk she used came from a cow down the road that gave very rich milk, the eggs were from our own hens, and the butter was often fresh churned. And if you didn't grow parsley, you didn't get it at all.

I confess, she never tried the dish with onions slow cooked or rich broth. These elements are my add-ons, after I sampled hard cooked eggs in a creamy sauce from a couple of nice little old ladies in France (gathered for a Sunset essay--in the days when we were seeking out great home cooks, not *tres chic* chefs). Their dish was in essence my mother's Eggs a la Goldenrod (ironically, a weed to which mother was hideously allergic) plus sweetly cooked onions and some dense, rich bone broth. The white sauce doesn't stay white, but the trade off is an upgrade.

Mother served the eggs on hot buttered toast, which I prefer. Rice was easier to manage for our potluck.

Humble, yes. Nostalgic--even more so. True comfort--especially if you are under 10 years of age..

Eggs a la Goldenrod

For 5 (my family's size)

4 tablespoons butter
1 onion (1/2- 3/4 lb.) finely chopped
6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
2 cups rich milk (or 1 1/2 cups any-fat milk and 1/2 cup whipping cream)
1 cup bone and meat broth thick enough to gel firm when chilled and if you want, a little more chicken broth
9 or 10 hard cooked eggs, whites and yolks separated
Salt and pepper to taste
1/4 cup chopped parsley
Hot buttered toast or hot cooked basmati rice (or Uncle Ben's)

In a 10 to 12 inch frying pan over medium-high heat melt butter with onions, stirring often. Continue to cook and stir frequently until onions are very lightly browned and smell and taste sweet and mellow.

Add flour, stir to mix well, then stir and cook until flour is slightly golden. Add 1 cup milk and mix well to get rid of flour lumps (there are the onions of course), then add remaining milk and the broth. Bring to a boil, stirring. Reduce heat to very low, faint bubble if any, and let sauce cook stirring to prevent sticking for about 15 minutes (to get rid of raw flour taste). Add more broth, a little at a time, if sauce is thicker than you like.

Chop the egg whites coarsely. Rub the egg yolks through a coarse strainer to pulverize. Stir whites into the hot sauce, season with salt and pepper to taste.

Put toast (which I much prefer) or spoon rice into wide soup bowls. and ladle sauce generously on top. Spoon egg yolks evenly onto each portion and sprinkle with parsley.

Baked Stuffed Manicotti

--Linda Carucci

This recipe was created by my beloved Grandmother Guglietta using the ricotta and mozzarella cheeses that my Grandfather made in his commercial dairy in Hartford, Connecticut. These ricotta filled crepes are incomparably light and delicate, and nothing at all like the thick, cardboard-like tubes of dried pasta you can buy in a box labeled manicotti. Terrific when eaten the day they're made, I like leftover manicotti even better. Reheat leftover manicotti, covered, in a 325 degree F oven until they are piping hot in the center, 30 to 45 minutes. To make this recipe ahead, cover and refrigerate the stuffed crepes up to 24 hours before topping them with sauce and baking. Over the years, these manicotti have been served at all sorts of important family events. I hope your family and friends enjoy them as much as we do.

Secrets

- Make the crepe batter an hour ahead so the gluten in the flour can relax. This keeps the crepes tender.
- For the lightest manicotti, make the crepes very thin by using as little batter as possible for each one. The crepe should be so thin that you can see your fingers through one when you hold it up to the light.
- The best tasting manicotti are made with fresh, creamy, whole milk ricotta cheese. I find the part-skim ricottas to be too grainy. Look for top quality ricotta at specialty cheese shops and Italian markets. It's rather perishable once opened, so buy just as much as you'll use in a few days. In this recipe, I prefer the more widely available cow's milk ricotta, over the dryer, artisanally produced sheep's milk cheese that is sometimes available.

Makes 15 to 18 manicotti, to serve 6 to 8 as a main course (or more as a first course)

Crepes

1 cup water
3 large eggs
1 teaspoon mild-tasting extra virgin olive oil, plus more for pan
1 cup all-purpose flour
Pinch of salt

Filling

1 1/2 pounds whole milk ricotta, any excess liquid at top of carton drained off (see Secret)
1/2 pound whole milk mozzarella, cut into rough 1/2-inch dice
3 tablespoons freshly grated Romano cheese

1 tablespoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1/4 teaspoon fine freshly ground pepper
1/4 teaspoon sugar
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
2 teaspoons butter for baking dishes

Assembly

6 cups (double batch) homemade Twenty-Minute Tomato Sauce, page xx
Freshly grated Romano cheese, for garnish
1 tablespoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, for garnish

Make the crepe batter: Place water, eggs, oil, flour and salt in a blender jar and blend at medium speed until mixed thoroughly. Scrape sides of blender and blend for a few more seconds. Strain through a fine-mesh strainer into a 1-quart liquid measure or medium bowl and refrigerate batter for at least one hour, or until all bubbles disappear. (It's okay to refrigerate batter overnight--stir if batter separates.)

Make the crepes: Place a 2-foot length of waxed paper on a flat surface near the stove. Keep roll of waxed paper handy. Heat a 6-inch crepe pan or saute pan over medium-high heat. Using a paper towel, rub about 1/4 teaspoon oil over surface of pan. When pan is hot, pour in a scant 1/4 cup crepe batter while simultaneously lifting and tilting pan to distribute batter evenly over entire surface. Don't worry if there are spots where the batter doesn't cover the bottom of the pan--for delicate crepes, it's better to have too little batter than too much. Return pan to burner and cook just until edges of the crepe start to curl and center is dry to the touch. Crepes should not brown. Run the tines of a fork between the edges of the crepe and the pan to release crepe. With your fingers, turn crepe and cook on second side just until dry, about 10 seconds. Slide crepe onto waxed paper, and straighten out, if necessary. It's not unusual for the first crepe to be a dud because it's too dark or too thick. Repeat with remaining crepe batter, placing crepes in single layers on fresh sheets of waxed paper. Once crepes are cool, it's okay to stack sheets of crepes on top of each other. You should end up with 15 to 18 usable crepes. Crepes can be made up to 24 hours ahead, covered, and kept in a cool, dry place.

Make the filling: In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together ricotta, mozzarella, Romano cheese, parsley, salt, pepper, and sugar. Taste, adjust seasoning, and add more grated cheese, if necessary. Add eggs and mix to blend completely. Mixture can be made up to 24 hours ahead, covered, and refrigerated.

Assemble the manicotti: Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Butter two baking dishes: one 13- by 9-inches and another 8 or 9 inches square. (Porcelain or clay baking dishes retain heat best).

Check to be sure that each crepe separates easily from the waxed paper. Use a blunt table knife, if necessary. Divide filling equally among crepes, placing about 2 heaping tablespoons in a strip down the center of each. Shape the manicotti by lifting one side of the crepe and folding it over the filling. Repeat with the other side, forming a cylinder. Do not roll crepes or tuck ends underneath; they should stay open for the filling to expand as it bakes. Shape remaining crepes and transfer to buttered baking dishes, seam side down. Turn the outside edges of the ends down into the pan as you place the manicotti closely beside each other. Recipe can be made to this point 24 hours in advance. Cover and refrigerate. Bring to room temperature before continuing.

Top manicotti with a very light layer of about 2 cups Tomato Sauce, saving some sauce for serving. Cover with aluminum foil and bake 25 to 30 minutes, or until bubbles appear in the center and around the edges of the baking dishes and manicotti are puffy and piping hot inside.

Let stand for 5 minutes for filling to set before serving. Reheat remaining Tomato Sauce. Use an offset icing spatula to remove manicotti from baking dish. Serve 1 or 2 manicotti per person, topped with a spoonful of hot sauce, a light sprinkling of grated cheese, and some chopped parsley.

Testers' Comments: "Light crepes, rich filling, flavorful sauce--we loved it! Made crepe batter and filling in the morning and assembled manicotti in the afternoon...I stacked the crepes on top of each other and they didn't stick together. Served this with green salad and garlic bread. Everyone preferred the lightness of these crepes to the heavy packaged pasta tubes...Delicious! Well received by family and they are tough critics. I wasn't thrilled with the ricotta I purchased, texture was a bit grainy. Will try another brand next time. Manicotti have always been a favorite of our clan. These are excellent."

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Spaghetti and Meatballs with Twenty-Minute Tomato Sauce

Linda Carucci

I must admit, I've never actually taught a recipe for spaghetti and meatballs in a cooking class. But it seems that whenever I teach a class that includes a pasta dish, someone asks why I don't put oil in the pasta cooking water. Or why I wait till the water boils to add the salt. And when I teach Timpano (page xx), it's not uncommon for people to remark about the unusual tenderness of the meatballs. So here it is, my version of the Italian-American favorite, adapted from my mother and grandmother's recipes. Growing up in an Italian-American household, we had either spaghetti or macaroni and meatballs once a week for supper. Whoever set the table or grated the cheese got to choose which shape we'd have: spaghetti, which included any variety of long pasta such as long fusilli, linguine, capellini, etc. or short shapes of macaroni such as ziti, rigatoni, farfalle, or mostaccioli, or the like. We never called it pasta in those days; it was either spaghetti or macaroni. Whichever you choose, for the authentic co-mingling of flavors and to keep the pasta separate, toss it with a little sauce and grated cheese before serving. You'll most likely have some sauce leftover, which you can put to good use in Weeknight Chile (page xx), Eggplant Parmigiana (page xx), Chicken Parmigiana (page xx), Calamari in Red Sauce (page xx), or Pot Roast and Gravy (page xx). Or just freeze it for a rainy day...you'll be glad you did.

Secrets

- *For the best flavor, use Italian canned San Marzano tomatoes. They are picked and packed at their peak of freshness, and rarely have a bitter taste. Look for San Marzano tomatoes in Italian markets and upscale grocery stores.*
- *For the best texture, puree the tomatoes in a food mill, food processor, or blender. Your sauce will be so thick and smooth, you won't need to add tomato paste.*
- *Contrary to the way I was taught--and in the interest of saving time cooking and cleaning up-- I don't fry my meatballs anymore. I simply roll them into balls, chill them for a few minutes to firm them, and drop them into simmering tomato sauce. Use a medium ice cream scoop to create balls of equal size. The secret to tender meatballs is twofold: (1) don't squeeze the meat mixture too much, and (2) simmer--don't boil--the meatballs gently in the sauce. As in any braised dish, boiling would toughen the protein fibers.*
- *Be sure to mince the onions for the meatballs and the sauce quite fine. As you sauté them for the sauce, be sure the onions are soft, tender, and translucent before you add the tomatoes. The acid in the tomatoes would impede their softening further, and you don't want crunchy onions in your marinara sauce.*
- *For all sorts of pasta cooking tips and secrets, please refer to the Chart/Sidebar on page xx (at the end of this recipe).*

Serves 4 to 6

Tomato Sauce

Three 28-ounce cans imported, peeled, San Marzano tomatoes (see Secret above)

2 tablespoons mild-tasting extra virgin olive oil

1 medium yellow onion, chopped into roughly 1/4-inch pieces

1/2 teaspoon dried leaf oregano, crumbled with your fingers

2 medium cloves garlic, peeled and crushed with the side of a chef knife, or minced

1 imported bay leaf

2 teaspoons kosher salt

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper

2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, from about 6 sprigs

1 sprig fresh basil

1 teaspoon sugar (optional)

Meatballs

Three 1/2-inch-thick slices day-old Italian or French bread (not sourdough), crusts removed

3 to 4 tablespoons milk (nonfat okay)

1/4 cup mild-tasting extra virgin olive oil, divided

1/2 cup finely chopped yellow onion, from 1 small onion

1 large egg

1/4 cup freshly grated Romano cheese

About 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, from 3 leaves of large sprigs

1 1/4 teaspoons kosher salt, divided

1/4 teaspoon granulated garlic powder

1/8 teaspoon fine, freshly ground black pepper

1 1/4 pounds ground beef chuck (see Secret)

Pasta

1 pound spaghetti or another pasta shape of your choice (see note above)

3/4 cup freshly grated Romano or Parmesan cheese, preferably imported (about 3 ounces)

Make the Tomato Sauce: Pass tomatoes and their packing juices through a food mill into a clean bowl. Use a rubber spatula to scrape clean the underside of the food mill to capture all of the puree. Discard seeds and cores. Alternatively, remove tomato cores by hand and puree tomatoes and packing juices in a food processor or blender. Set aside.

Heat a heavy 6-quart Dutch oven or heavy pot over medium heat. Add olive oil. When oil is hot enough to sizzle a piece of onion, add onions and sauté just until

they become translucent, about 5 minutes. Add oregano and crushed or minced garlic and sauté 1 minute, stirring often so garlic doesn't brown.

Add reserved pureed tomatoes, bay leaf, salt, and pepper, and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to simmer and add half of the parsley and the basil sprig. Simmer sauce, partially covered, for 15 to 20 minutes, or until the consistency is no longer watery. Taste and add sugar, if necessary, to reduce acidity. Add more salt and pepper, if necessary. (Sauce may be made up to 48 hours ahead. Bring to room temperature, then store, covered, in refrigerator if making more than 4 to 6 hours ahead. Reheat to a gentle simmer before continuing.)

Make the Meatballs: Tear bread into roughly 1-inch pieces and place in a medium mixing bowl. Pour 3 tablespoons milk over bread and let stand to moisten bread, about 10 minutes. Squeeze bread with your fingers; if it feels dry, add another tablespoon of milk. Shred bread into roughly 1/2-inch pieces and set aside.

Heat a 12-inch sauté pan over medium heat. Add 1 tablespoon of the oil. When oil is hot enough to sizzle a piece of onion, add onions and sauté over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until soft and translucent, but not brown, about 5 minutes. Reduce heat to low, sprinkle onions with about 1/4 teaspoon of the salt, and continue cooking until they begin to get sticky, about 5 more minutes. Remove pan from heat and set aside.

In a small bowl, mix egg lightly with a fork. Add cheese, parsley, remaining 1 teaspoon salt, garlic powder, and pepper and stir with fork to combine. Transfer to bowl with bread and stir to combine. Add ground beef and sautéed onions and mix with a fork or your hands until bread mixture is evenly incorporated and ingredients are combined.

Shape a little of the mixture into a small patty and fry (or microwave--see Secret) to test for seasoning. Taste and add more grated cheese, salt, pepper, and/or garlic powder, if necessary, to bring flavors into balance.

Portion meatball mixture with a medium ice cream scoop into 12 to 16 meatballs, depending on preferred size. Rinse hands with cold water to prevent mixture from sticking as you gently compress and shape balls. (Meatballs can be prepared up to 24 hours ahead. Cover tightly with plastic wrap if preparing more than 1 hour in advance.)

Heat remaining 3 tablespoons oil in same pan used for onions. When oil is hot, add meatballs and sauté until browned nicely on all sides, about 15 minutes total. Use a splatter guard or cover adjacent burners with aluminum foil to make clean-up easier. Do not crowd meatballs in pan--brown in batches if necessary. To preserve the crusty exterior, use a fork or thin metal spatula to turn meatballs,

first loosening them on the bottom, before turning. Transfer to a plate and brown remaining meatballs if cooking in batches.

Bring sauce to a steady simmer and add meatballs one by one. To keep them tender, regulate heat as necessary to keep sauce at a steady simmer. Simmer gently, stirring occasionally, for about 10 minutes, until meatballs are cooked through and piping hot inside. Stir in the remaining 1 tablespoon chopped parsley.

Make the Pasta: Bring a 6-quart pot of water to a boil for the pasta. When the water comes to a boil, add the salt and pasta. If you're cooking spaghetti or another long pasta, don't break the pasta, but slide it into the pot slowly as it softens in the water. Cook at a rolling boil, stirring often, according to package directions, until pasta is al dente, or tender with no chalkiness inside. Strain well in a colander and return empty pot to a cool burner on the stove.

Remove and discard bay leaf, basil sprig, and crushed garlic, if using, from tomato sauce. Place 1 cup sauce, strained pasta, and 1/4 cup of the grated cheese into empty pasta pot. Toss well with tongs. Transfer to a heated shallow pasta serving bowl, top with a ladle or two of sauce, and sprinkle with a tablespoon or so of the grated cheese. Arrange meatballs on top. Fill a warm bowl with extra sauce to serve on the side, along with the remaining grated cheese, and add more sauce and cheese to each individual serving.

Testers' Comments: "Classic dish with great aromas and nice flavors. My husband was born and raised in Naples, Italy, and really enjoyed this dish. His family would eat meatballs in tomato sauce, but not on pasta. He's adapted to this American version...Meatballs are delicious with a lovely texture--great secrets for cooking them. Nice, thick, full-bodied sauce...Found San Marzano tomatoes at Whole Foods--used food processor to puree. Everyone thinks these meatballs are wonderful, sauce is perfectly seasoned. Will definitely make this again."

Chart/Sidebar: How to Cook Perfect Pasta

- Always start with fresh water from cold water tap when cooking pasta. (Water from the hot water faucet isn't as fresh because it's been sitting in hot water heater.)
- My favorite pasta producer, Rustichella d'Abruzzo from Italy, recommends using 1 quart of water to cook every 1/4 pound of pasta. Bring water to a rolling boil in a large pot. For 1 pound pasta, use a 6-quart pot. A lightweight pot is best because it takes less time for the water to come to the initial boil, and to return to a boil after adding the pasta.
- Add enough salt to flavor the water. Rustichella recommends 1 1/2 teaspoons fine sea salt or table salt (or I use 1 tablespoon Diamond Crystal Kosher Salt) per quart of water. If your pot is stainless steel, it's okay to add the salt as you're heating the water. Otherwise, salt can leave spotty deposits on the

surface of the pan, called pitting. (Because salt changes the boiling temperature of water, some chefs and fine cooks wait until water comes to a boil before adding the salt. This way, they're sure the water is at a true 212 degrees F. It's okay to add the salt before the water comes to a boil, as long as it's at a steady, ferocious rumble when you add the pasta.

- Stir the pasta into the boiling, salted water. If you're making long pasta such as spaghetti, slowly push it down into the water as it softens--never break it!
- Stir often with a wooden fork or spoon and regulate heat to maintain a steady boil.
- Don't add oil to the pasta water, or the pasta will become slick and repel the sauce.
- Set timer for a few minutes less than what is directed on the package. Taste pasta every minute after timer rings until texture is chewy, without a trace of chalkiness on the inside. Save a cup or so of pasta cooking water to thin sauce when tossing, if desired. To stop the cooking, pour a glass of cold water into the pot. Strain pasta in a colander and shake a few times to dislodge excess water.
- Unless you plan to use the cooked pasta in a good ol' American macaroni salad, never rinse it. The starch that clings to the pasta at this point is what makes the sauce adhere to it. Also, I find that when pasta is hot, it absorbs the most flavor from the other ingredients in the dish, especially if tossing with tomato sauce or a simple olive oil dressing, as in Orzo with Toybox Tomatoes.