

PIEDMONT

Dining with family and friends

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FOREWORD



Cristina (left) and Marion.

COOKING DELICIOUS MEALS FOR GUESTS who enjoy each other’s company – a long table, where we share not only good, but also life – there is a deep beauty in this. Lively conversations. Glances back and forth. Laughter. An arm around someone’s shoulder. And enjoying the meal. In my case: Piedmontese cuisine, to which I like to add my own touch, making the special, classic recipes even more special. That is my passion.

Compliments on my cooking always nice, but I don’t cook for myself – it’s something to be shared. I love the profession immensely, I can experiment endlessly until a dish is truly perfect, but the main reason I have made cooking my life’s work is because I want to bring people together, each with their own background and story, and connect them. They come together at our table for a shared meal and are connected by my dishes. That is the essence.

One evening, Dutch journalist Marion and her husband were dining with my family at our agriturismo. During dessert (nougat spumone, see page 150), Marion asked me if I would consider compiling my recipes into a cookbook. It had never occurred to me to consider it. But as I thought more about it, the more I wanted to do it. And from that moment on, the book started to form! It stopped being something theoretical, and became something I worked hard on.

For this cookbook, I collected more than fifty dishes that are typical of Piedmont, where I have lived all my life. They are very different from what you get served in the rest of Italy. Rustic and refined: very special and world-famous for good reason. I have often cooked the dishes in this book at our agriturismo. They are usually easy to prepare and yet rich in flavour. My guests enjoy them immensely and I love that I can now share them with so many more people. Including you.

In the second part of the book, you will find all my recipes. In the first part, I tell you more about Piedmontese cuisine, about myself, my philosophy, and I give all kinds of tips so that you too can surprise your guests with the most delicious dishes.

Enjoy cooking!

Cristina Baltieri



IN MY YOUNGER YEARS, I didn't have the passion for cooking that I have now. I worked hard at school, and got good grades – and I and I remember well how my mother made lunch and dinner for the whole family every day. Her rules were: use seasonal produce, waste nothing, prepare everything well and work efficiently. They're principles I still adhere to to this day.

At the age of 22, I met Franco, to whom I have now been married for almost thirty years. Franco's ancestors settled in the Piedmontese town of Albugnano in 1803, and since 1817 the family has owned an estate, initially consisting mainly of vineyards and now also hazelnut orchards, fruit orchards and arable crops.

In the early years of our relationship, Franco and I often went out to dinner with a group of friends. We would be welcomed into one of their homes, where the most delicious dishes were prepared. For me, this was always a little uncomfortable: I was the youngest in the group, an amateur in the kitchen, and felt unable to invite them to my home. Franco didn't say anything about it; he respected my reluctance and never made me feel guilty about it. But when we got married a year and a half after we first met, he said to me, 'Cristina, we can't put it off any longer. Now we have to invite our friends over to our place too.' I replied: 'I'm going to take some cooking lessons, and when I'm ready, we'll do that.'

Shortly afterwards, I started taking courses. I discovered a whole new world, with inspiring people. And I felt at home there. My natural

Albugnano is a beautifully situated village in Piedmont. Its showpiece is the 12th-century abbey of Vezzolano.

THE FOUR COURSES

ANTIPASTI ARE WONDERFUL. THERE IS SO MUCH VARIETY, AND YOU CAN REALLY USE YOUR IMAGINATION.

PRIMI ARE THE BASIS OF THE MEAL. THEY TASTE FAMILIAR AND PROVIDE THE ENERGY NEEDED TO WORK HARD.

WE USED TO ONLY EAT MEAT ON SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS. IT FEELS LUXURIOUS THAT **SECONDI** ARE NOW SOMETIMES SERVED DURING THE WEEK AS WELL.

SEMPRE DOLCI IS MY MOTTO: ALWAYS **DOLCI**. BECAUSE IT MAKES YOU SO HAPPY.



STUFFED ONIONS FROM THE OVEN

Cipolle cotte in forno ripiene alla toma d'alpeggio

INGREDIENTS (6 people)

6 medium onions
coarse sea salt (plenty)
200 g Piedmontese toma cheese, cubed (you can also use Munster cheese, which has a similar texture but a sharper flavour), taleggio cheese, or young Gouda cheese
1 egg
50 g Parmesan cheese, grated
50 g breadcrumbs
1 tsp fresh parsley, chopped
salt and pepper

KITCHEN EQUIPMENT
hand blender or food processor

PREPARATION TIME
approx. 35 minutes oven time
approx. 70 minutes total

PREPARATION

Preheat the oven to 160 °C. Wash the onions without peeling them (i.e. with the brown skin still on) and place them in an oven dish with a base covered with coarse sea salt. Bake the onions in the oven at 160 °C for about 15 to 25 minutes until they are soft. This is a guideline, as it depends very much on the size of the onions. You should be able to press them in. Allow the onions to cool thoroughly.

Set the oven to 180 °C.

Remove the excess coarse sea salt, cut off the tops of the onions and set them aside. Scoop out the onions with a spoon or a small, sharp knife, but leave the outer inner ring intact so that the onion retains its shape and remains standing. Finely chop the inside of the onions with a hand blender and mix with the egg, grated Parmesan cheese, breadcrumbs and chopped fresh parsley.

Add the cheese cubes to the onion mixture, mix with a hand blender or stir well and season with salt and pepper. Don't forget to taste it, as the cheese makes the filling quite salty. Fill the hollowed-out onions with the mixture and place them in a greased oven dish. If there is any filling left over, you can put it in a greased oven dish and place it in the oven. Make sure the stuffed onions remain upright. Bake them in the oven at 180 °C for about 15 minutes until the top is a nice golden-brown colour. Put the top back on each onion and serve piping hot.



FLAN OF BORAGE

Sformato di borragine ed erbe di campo

INGREDIENTS (6 to 8 people)

500 g leafy vegetables (e.g. Swiss chard or spinach)
500 g wild field herbs and wild flowers (borage, nettle, dandelion, violets, primroses, hops, wild asparagus, etc.)
1 baby onion (young onion), finely chopped
250 g ricotta
125 g full-fat yoghurt
2 generous tablespoons breadcrumbs
2 generous tablespoons Parmesan cheese, grated
2 tablespoons diced ham
3 eggs
3 egg yolks & 3 egg whites
zest and juice of 1 untreated lemon
extra virgin olive oil
salt and pepper

FOR THE RASPBERRY VINEGAR

250 g raspberries
500 ml white wine vinegar
180 g sugar

KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

cake tin
mixer

PREPARATION TIME

the raspberry vinegar must be prepared one day in advance.
60 minutes (including 45 minutes oven time)

PREPARATION

Preheat the oven to 180 °C. Wash the leafy vegetables and wild herbs and cook them briefly (a few minutes) in a little water with salt. Drain and cool the herbs and leafy vegetables, then squeeze them dry. Remove the hard parts of the herbs and finely chop the leafy vegetables and herbs with a kitchen knife. Sauté the finely chopped onion in a pan (in a little extra virgin olive oil and water) and add the sautéed onion to the herbs and leafy vegetables.

In a bowl, mix the ricotta with the full-fat yoghurt, grated Parmesan, salt and pepper. Add the herbs and leafy vegetables, breadcrumbs, diced ham, lemon zest, whole eggs, egg yolks and a little more salt if necessary. Mix everything together well. Beat the egg whites until stiff with a few drops of lemon juice and carefully fold the egg whites into the herb mixture in the bowl.

Pour the mixture into a cake tin greased with butter or baking spray (or line the cake tin with baking paper) and bake the flan for about 45 minutes in a bain-marie in an oven at 180 °C. You can do this by placing the cake tin in an oven dish filled with hot water (the dish should be filled with water to a maximum of 1/3) or by placing a bowl of hot water next to the flan in the oven. After about 45 minutes, when the top has turned a nice golden yellow colour, remove the flan from the oven and leave it to rest for a while.

Remove the flan from the tin, place it on a serving dish and decorate with some wild flowers and herbs. Serve in slices sprinkled with the raspberry vinegar. The flan can be eaten warm or cold.

How to make the raspberry vinegar

Put the raspberries and white wine vinegar in a bowl and leave to soak for 24 hours. Drain the raspberries and briefly boil the raspberry vinegar with the sugar. Leave to cool, pour into a bottle, seal and store in a cool, dry place.



SQUARE AGNOLOTTI FROM MONFERRATO

Agnolotti monferrini quadrati al sugo di arrosto

INGREDIENTS (6 people)

FOR THE FILLING

1 onion
1 carrot
1 celery stalk
1 teaspoon fresh rosemary, crushed
200 g veal stewing meat (e.g. veal shank or veal shoulder)
125 g pork stewing meat (e.g. ham)
75 g rabbit meat (you can also use any other meat, e.g. beef)
generous dash of white wine
approx. 400 ml stock
100 g spinach
1 egg
2 tbsp Parmesan cheese, grated
pinch of nutmeg
1 tbsp butter (optional)
salt and pepper

FOR THE DOUGH

400 g type 00 flour, extra for dusting
100 g semolina (durum)
4 eggs
1 extra egg for brushing the dough
30 ml water (if necessary)
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
5 g salt

KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

pasta machine
dough board or dough plate
food processor
serrated dough cutter

PREPARATION TIME

making the pasta dough: 30 minutes and at least 30 minutes resting time
making the filling: 15 minutes preparation time and at least 60 minutes simmering time
making/filling the pasta: 30 minutes

PREPARATION

For the filling: peel and roughly chop the onion, carrot and celery and fry them in olive oil with rosemary. Cut the meat into small pieces. Add the meat and fry it with the vegetables. When the meat is browned, season with salt and pepper, deglaze with the white wine and simmer for at least 1 hour until the meat is tender and cooked through. Add the stock little by little during cooking.

Meanwhile, briefly cook the spinach, squeeze out the excess water and chop finely.

Drain the meat/vegetable juices and set the meat juices aside. Finely grind the meat and vegetables in a meat grinder or food processor. Add the egg, finely chopped spinach and grated Parmesan cheese to the ground meat and mix well to form a fine mixture. Season with salt, pepper and nutmeg (don't forget to taste).

For the dough: sift the flour, semolina and salt, and pile it up on a pastry board. If you don't have a pastry board, make sure your work surface is dusted with flour to prevent sticking. Make a well in the flour and add the eggs and olive oil to the well you've formed. Stir the egg mixture with your fingers, gradually adding some of the flour. The mixing will come together, and then you're kneading. Knead vigorously until smooth and elastic. If the dough is too dry, add the water. Cover the dough with cling film and leave to rest for at least half an hour.

For rolling out the dough and filling and making the agnolotti, see page 102.

Bring a large pan of well-salted water to the boil. The larger the pan, the less likely the agnolotti are to stick together. Dip the agnolotti in briefly (maximum 2 to 3 minutes) and drain. Heat the meat gravy that you set aside – a tablespoon of butter is a nice addition – and then sauté the agnolotti briefly over high heat in the gravy and serve the dish in a deep plate.





RAVIOLI WITH TWO CHEESES AND HAZELNUTS

Sorpresine di robiola e nocciole al burro e salvia

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE PASTRY

*300 g type 00 flour, plus extra for dusting
3 eggs, plus 1 extra beaten egg for sealing the ravioli
salt*

FOR THE FILLING

*60 g hazelnuts, extra for garnish
200 g Toma Piemontese (you can also use another
semi-hard cheese)
250 g robiola (you can also use another creamy,
spreadable cheese)
salt and pepper*

FOR THE SAGE BUTTER

*100 g butter
8 fresh sage leaves, extra for garnish
chestnut honey (optional)*

KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

*pasta machine
food processor (optional)
ravioli mould (optional)
serrated pasta cutter (optional, can also be done with
a regular knife)*

PREPARATION TIME

75 minutes

PREPARATION

For the dough: mix the salt and flour, make a well in the flour and break the eggs into the centre. Stir the egg mixture with your fingers, gradually adding some of the flour. At a certain point, the mixing will turn into kneading. Knead well until you have a firm, homogeneous and workable dough. Cover the dough with cling film and leave to rest for at least half an hour.

For the filling: roast the hazelnuts in a dry frying pan and chop them finely. Finely chop the toma or other semi-hard cheese (in a food processor if necessary) and mix with the hazelnuts and robiola. Taste the filling and season with salt and pepper.

Cut a piece of the dough and pass it through the pasta machine. Start with the coarsest setting. Fold it in half and pass it through again, repeating until you have a smooth sheet. Then set the machine to a finer setting and repeat until you have rolled out the sheet to the finest setting. If you don't have a pasta machine, you'll need to use muscle power and a rolling pin.

Place the sheets of dough on a lightly floured work surface. Cut out circles from the dough with a cookie cutter. Put the filling in a piping bag or use a spoon. Place small piles of filling on half of the cut-out shapes (depending on the size of the cutter, you can determine how much filling to use), fold them in half, push the air out of the filling with your thumb and seal the edges firmly, using a little water if necessary.

Cook the ravioli for 3 to 4 minutes in plenty of boiling salted water. Remove them carefully from the water with a slotted spoon when they are ready. Keep the cooking liquid.

Heat the butter and fresh sage leaves in a large frying pan, add a little of the pasta cooking liquid and add the cooked and drained ravioli. Sauté for one minute to bring out the flavour.

Place a generous spoonful of ravioli on the plate and garnish with some fresh sage leaves, crushed hazelnuts and, if you like contrast, a drop of chestnut honey.



FILLING AGNOLOTTI

Two ways to prepare this typical Piedmontese pasta dish.

In my kitchen, agnolotti are made in large quantities. The work always brings peace and conviviality: the repetitive movements, the routines, it is *un momento di relax* for me. At other times, cooking is done quietly and with concentration; when preparing pasta, the music is turned on and there is relaxed conversation.

FOR ALL FILLED PASTA

Cut a piece of the dough and pass it through the pasta machine. Start with the coarsest setting. Fold it in half each time and pass it through again, until it is a smooth sheet. Then set the machine to a finer setting and repeat this until you have rolled out the sheet to the finest setting. It doesn't matter if you don't have a pasta machine, but you'll have to use a rolling pin and muscle power! The dough needs to be rolled out thinly. Sprinkle a little flour on your work surface (or use a pastry board) and place the sheets on it.

MAKING AGNOLOTTI WITH A RAVIOLI MOULD

If you have a ravioli mould (see image), this is the best way to make agnolotti. Place a sheet of dough on the mould, fill the recesses with the meat and vegetable mixture, place another sheet on top and press down firmly. Make sure the filling is sealed well and airtight. Cut off the outer edges, remove the agnolotti from the mould and cut them apart with a serrated roller. Place the agnolotti on a dry, clean tea towel dusted with flour until ready to use.

MAKING AGNOLOTTI WITHOUT A RAVIOLI MOULD

Cut strips approximately 5 cm wide. Brush one strip lightly with beaten egg mixed with a little water. This helps the dough to stick together and prevents the agnolotti from bursting open during cooking. Using a spoon or piping bag, place mounds of filling the size of half a walnut on top. The distance between the mounds is about 4 cm. You can also make smaller mounds closer together. When you reach the end of the strip, cover it with another strip of dough and press the edges together lightly. Make sure the filling is sealed well and airtight by pressing the pasta between the mounds of filling with your index finger or thumb. Cut off the side edges with a serrated dough cutter. Then cut the squares apart, again with a dough cutter. Place the agnolotti on a floured, dry and clean tea towel until ready to use.

TRIANGLES

The easiest way to make the triangles from page 100 is with a ravioli mould. If you don't have one, then place a large piece of dough on a lightly floured work surface or pastry board and brush half of it lightly with beaten egg mixed with a little water. Fill half of the dough with small mounds of filling (use a spoon or piping bag). The size of the mounds and the distance between them depends on the size of the ravioli you want to make. Fold the other half loosely over the top, press out the air around the filling with your thumbs and cut them loose with a serrated ravioli cutter. Place the ravioli on a floured, dry and clean tea towel until ready to use.

Good to know

You can store fresh filled pasta in the freezer for a month. Fresh pasta without filling can be stored for three months.

STUFFED CABBAGE ROLLS

Fagottini di cavolo

INGREDIENTS *(4 people)*

- 1 savoy cabbage*
- 1 clove of garlic, peeled*
- 2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped*
- 2 to 4 fresh sage leaves, chopped*
- 300 g roast meat leftovers, minced (or alternatively 300 g minced veal and 100 g pork sausage)*
- 1 egg*
- 2 heaped tbsp Parmesan cheese, grated*
- 50 g salami, finely sliced*
- salt and pepper*

KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

- food processor (if using meat leftovers)*
- ice cubes or frozen cooling element*

PREPARATION TIME

- 70 minutes preparation*
- 30 to 35 minutes oven time*

PREPARATION

Finely chop the garlic clove, chopped parsley and sage, and ground roast meat in the food processor. If you are using minced veal and sausage meat, you do not need to use the food processor. Then add the egg, Parmesan cheese, and salami, and salt and pepper to taste. Mix everything well until you have a homogeneous mixture.

Cut off the outer cabbage leaves one by one, making sure they remain intact. You will need between 15 and 20 leaves for this amount of filling. Blanch the cabbage leaves one by one briefly (maximum 3 minutes) in plenty of boiling water with a little salt. They should soften but not fall apart. Then rinse them immediately with cold water; place them in a bowl of cold water with ice cubes or a cooling element, for example. This ‘shock’ of cold water ensures that the leaves remain a beautiful green colour. Drain them on a clean tea towel and pat them dry with kitchen paper. It is best to remove the tough midrib from the cabbage leaves with a pointed paring knife.

Preheat the oven to 180 °C. Place a generous tablespoon of the minced meat mixture in the centre of each leaf. Roll the leaves into small bundles/rolls (fold the outer edges inwards) and place them in a greased oven dish, touching each other. Brush the surface of the cabbage rolls with melted butter and bake them in the preheated oven at 180 °C for about 30 to 35 minutes until the top is nicely browned.

Tip

You can serve them with broccoli florets and cooked cauliflower (al dente) and possibly a piece of grilled bread.



CLASSIC BONÈT

Bonet piemontese

INGREDIENTS *(6 to 8 people)*

- 100 g (preferably hard) Amaretti biscuits, extra to serve*
- 50 g cocoa powder (optionally 35 g bitter cocoa powder and 15 g sweet cocoa powder)*
- 500 ml whole milk*
- 5 eggs*
- 125 g sugar*
- 3 tbsp sugar for the caramel (optional)*
- ½ cup ristretto coffee*
- 15 ml (small shot glass) Fernet Branca Menta (or another bitter liqueur)*
- whipped cream, for decoration*

KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

- cake tin (25 to 30 cm) or small baking tins*
- simple food processor*
- mixer*
- large roasting tin that fits the cake tin*

PREPARATION TIME

- 30 minutes preparation*
- 40 to 60 minutes baking time*
- at least 4 hours resting time in the refrigerator*

PREPARATION

Preheat the oven to 160 °C. The bonèt can be made with or without caramel. If you find the caramel rim too, skip the rest of the next paragraph.

Caramelise the extra sugar in a heavy-based pan (see also page 158). Go for the dark variety without water. Once made, quickly pour the caramel into a well-greased cake tin (or baking tins) using baking spray. Swirl around so that the caramel is distributed evenly over the base. Set aside. Grind the amaretti biscuits in a food processor. Add the cocoa powder and mix well.

Bring the milk to the boil in a large pan with the crumbled biscuits and cocoa. Simmer for 4 minutes, stirring well with a whisk. Then add the coffee and spirits to the warm milk. Simmer for another minute, stirring continuously. Then remove from the heat.

In another bowl, beat the eggs and sugar with a mixer until light and fluffy. Now add the egg mixture to the warm milk, beating continuously.

Pour the mixture into the caramelised cake tin. Place the cake tin in an oven dish with hot water; the water should come up to at least a third of the way up the tin. Bake the bonèt in a bain-marie in the oven for 40 to 60 minutes.

Remove the bonèt from the oven when the edges are firm (the centre may still be a little wobbly). Allow the dessert to cool thoroughly in the tin and leave it covered in the fridge for 4 hours (or preferably overnight) to set.

Cut the bonèt loose from the inside of the mould with a sharp knife. Turn the bonèt upside down onto a serving dish. Cut into slices and serve with some extra Amaretti biscuits and whipped cream.





OVEN-BAKED APPLES WITH CHOCOLATE HEART

Mele al forno con cuore al cioccolato

INGREDIENTS *(6 people)*

6 apples (preferably old apple varieties, which are firm and flavourful)
1 orange, juiced
6 teaspoons cane sugar (approx. 25 g, 1 teaspoon per apple)
pinch of ground cinnamon, to taste
pinch of ground cloves, to taste
120 g dark chocolate, roughly chopped (approx. 20 g per apple)
zest of 1 untreated orange
50 g flaked almonds or chopped hazelnuts
white wine (Moscato is very tasty in this recipe)
melted butter, for greasing the dish

KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

apple corer
kitchen funnel (optional)

PREPARATION TIME

20 minutes preparation
45 minutes oven time

PREPARATION

Preheat the oven to 180 °C. Peel the apples neatly, remove the core with an apple corer and place them in a buttered oven dish.

Brush the apples all over with orange juice (using a pastry brush). Mix the cane sugar with cinnamon and/or a pinch of ground cloves to taste. Fill the hollows in the apples with pieces of dark chocolate (about 20 grams per apple, depending on the size of the apple; no need to not cram them in) and 1 teaspoon of cane sugar per apple. You can use a kitchen funnel for this.

Sprinkle the apples with the grated orange zest and finally with the flaked almonds or chopped hazelnuts. Pour the white wine into the oven dish; the apples should be about 1 centimetre deep in the wine.

Place the oven dish in the oven at 180 °C for about 45 minutes. After 45 minutes, pierce the apples to see if they are soft. If not, leave them in the oven for a little longer. Keep an eye on the grated zest and nut flakes to make sure they don't turn black (if they do, cover the apples with some aluminium foil). The apples are ready when they are soft and have a nice golden colour. Sprinkle some orange zest on top for colour, if desired.