Twelve Days of Cooking with Nonna

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My dearest Catherine,

As soon as I saw what a perfect job you did with my eggplant parmesan recipe during my visit to your home, I came up with this idea: you cook with such love, bella nonna, that you make nonna proud. You and Steven are our family. -Daniel's, Trace's and mine. Family should have good food that can be shared over laughter and love with each other and friends.

I love you, bella, and my nipote, Steven, so very much. I wish you many happy years and many happy meals throughout your life. And very special people to share them with.

Love always, Nonna
Chicken Cacciatore

Ingredients

1 tbsp. onion powder
1 tbsp. garlic powder
3 cloves garlic
1 cup olive oil
1 tsp. dried oregano
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. pepper
4 bell peppers, sliced into strips
6 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into cubes
3-28 oz. cans Reinzi brand (if available) crushed, peeled, Italian plum tomatoes
¾ of a 28 oz. can of water (use tomatoes can)
2 lbs. penne, freshly cooked OR ½ cup rice per person

Preparation

In a large gravy pot, (if you do not have a big enough pot, make two pots of Cacciatore simultaneously) heat the oil and add onion and garlic.

When onion and garlic cloves are lightly browned, add chicken. When chicken is browned, add tomatoes and water. Bring to a boil.

Keep at a low boil for 40 minutes and add spices and sliced peppers. Cook on low until peppers are soft (about ten minutes).

Serve over penne (or your favorite pasta), or rice.

Makes approx. 10 servings.

Catherine, Bella, this is wonderful with rice or pasta and very healthy, too! You can make this for parties, it’s better if you make it early and let it rest, then just heat and serve.
Nonna’s Gravy

Ingredients

3-28 oz. cans (Rienzi brand if available) crushed, peeled, Italian plum tomatoes
1-8 oz. can tomato paste – optional (if you prefer thicker gravy)
½ red onion, diced
4 cloves garlic, diced
⅛ cup olive or canola oil (enough to cover the bottom of the gravy pot)
3 tsp. dried oregano
3 tsp. dried basil
3 tsp. dried parsley
1 tsp. dried onion powder
1 tsp. dried garlic powder

Preparation

Brown onion and garlic in oil. Add tomatoes and spices. Bring to a rolling boil for 15 minutes. Lower heat and simmer for another 25 minutes.

This version is “marinara” without meat. Meatballs or sausage can be added and cooked separately or in gravy. If doing the latter, cook until meat is thoroughly cooked. Approximately 2 hours.

Serve over pasta!
Meatballs

Ingredients

2 lbs. lean ground beef
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. parsley
1 egg
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Preparation

Mix ingredients in mixing bowl with your hands.
Roll into golf ball sized balls and fry in canola oil or
boil in Nonna’s gravy (see above) for 2 hours until
thoroughly cooked.

Serve over pasta!

Twelve Days of Cooking with Nonna
Escarole & Beans

**Ingredients**

- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 large heads escarole
- 2-16 oz. cans cannellini beans, undrained
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 12 oz. water
- Dash of onion powder

**Preparation**

Mix ingredients in mixing bowl with your hands. In a large gravy pot, heat olive oil over medium heat. Stir in garlic. Add escarole. Sauté for 3-4 minutes. Add beans, water, onion powder, salt and pepper. Simmer for 40 minutes or until tender. Serve as a hearty soup with crusty Italian bread or even over pasta!

Twelve Days of Cooking with Nonna
Eggplant Parmesan

**Ingredients**

- 2 large eggplants
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 4 cups Nonna’s Gravy made with whole peeled tomatoes (preferably Rienzi brand)
- 1½ cups breadcrumbs
- 1¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 4 eggs, beaten (more if needed)
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1½ lbs. mozzarella, grated

**Preparation**

Slice eggplant into ¼-inch thick slices. Lay slices out on layers of paper towels. Let eggplant sit and release moisture for 2 hours.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Combine 1½ cups of breadcrumbs with ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese and place in a dish. Set up your work area so you have eggs in one bowl and the breadcrumb cheese mixture in another.

Working one at a time, dredge eggplant slices first in beaten eggs, and then in breadcrumb/Parmesan cheese mixture. Place on sheets of tin foil, set aside until completed. Then, fry eggplant in oil and lay out on paper towel to absorb excess oil.

Spread ½ cup of Nonna’s Gravy into the bottom of a 9x13-inch casserole dish. Place a layer of eggplant rounds covering the gravy in the bottom of the pan.

Layer mozzarella on top of eggplant. Sprinkle 1/3 cup of Parmesan cheese. Place another layer of eggplant over the cheese. Spread 1 cup of gravy over the eggplant. Repeat, alternating eggplant and cheese, making sure the final layer is gravy and cheese.

Bake uncovered at 350°F for 20 minutes or until cheese is all melty and gooey. Remove from oven and let sit for 10 minutes before cutting into to serve.
Pasta e Fagoli

Ingredients

3 tbsp. vegetable oil
½ onion, chopped fine
1 garlic clove, minced
2-16 oz. cans of chick peas
(or you may substitute white beans)
1-28 oz. can Rienzi brand whole, peeled tomatoes,
blended until smooth
28 oz. water (use tomatoes can)
1 cup Barilla brand ditalini or other very
small tubular pasta
Freshly grated Parmesan as an accompaniment

Preparation

In a pot cook the onion and garlic in the oil,
stirring, until the onion is softened.

Add all ingredients except pasta and simmer
covered, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes.

Add pasta, simmer the soup, covered, for another
10 - 15 minutes until pasta is cooked.

Sprinkle with Parmesan and serve in soup bowls
with crusty Italian bread.

I hope you and Steven
can find some crusty
bread! If not, we'll get
you a recipe for that.

Twelve Days of Cooking with Nonna
Zuppa di Pesce

Ingredients

- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 lbs. scallops
- 2 lbs. large peeled shrimp
- 1 lb. calamari rings
- 24 mussels, cleaned
- 24 littleneck clams, scrubbed
- 3-14.5 oz. cans crushed tomatoes
- 1 cup water
- 2-6.5 oz. cans chopped clams
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 tbsp. red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1 tbsp. chopped garlic
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 tsp. dried parsley
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2-16 oz. packages linguine (fresh if you can get it)

Preparation

Heat olive oil in large pan over medium heat; stir scallops, shrimp, and calamari until scallops and calamari are opaque and shrimp are pink, approximately 5 minutes.

Bring a separate pot of water to a boil and add mussels and clams to the boiling water; cook until shells are opened, about 3 minutes. Remove shellfish and rinse with hot water.

Pour crushed tomatoes, water, 2 cans chopped clams, ¼ cup olive oil, onion, red pepper flakes, garlic, oregano, parsley, and salt into a large pot and bring to a boil. Stir cooked scallops, shrimp, calamari, mussels in shells, and littleneck clams in shells into tomato mixture. Reduce heat and simmer for 1 hour.

Serve over linguini. Serves about 10 people.
Spaghetti Carbonara

Ingredients

- 8 oz. spaghetti
- 2 large eggs
- 3/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 4 slices bacon, diced
- 4 cloves garlic, diced
- salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 tbsp. chopped fresh parsley leaves
  (or 1 tsp. dried parsley)

Preparation

In a large pot, cook pasta; save ½ cup of the pasta water and drain the rest.

Beat eggs and Parmesan together and set aside.

Cook bacon crispy, save the extra fat drippings.

Stir in garlic, then stir in pasta and egg/parm mixture, toss and add salt and pepper.

Add reserved pasta water, one tablespoon at a time, until consistency is not too watery, not too 'gummy.' Serve immediately.
Broccoli Rabe

Ingredients

- 2 lbs. broccoli rabe
- 5 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 large garlic cloves, crushed
- salt and red pepper flakes to taste
- 3 tbsp. oil
- (optional: 1 lb. sweet Italian sausage)

This dish can also be made with the sausage.*
We serve it without.

If serving over pasta, small “shells” are a nice choice, they “hold” the flavor well. Add pecorino cheese if serving over pasta.

*If adding sausage, cook the sweet Italian sausage separate and drain fat. Crumble and toss into the broccoli rabe just as it’s finished cooking.

Preparation

Cut off and throw away the bottom part of the broccoli rabe stems, leave broccoli about 7 inches long. Remove large tough leaves, leaving just tender leaves and flower buds. Peel the thick, lower part of the stems with a vegetable peeler or they will be bitter. Cut the stems into 1½” pieces.
Wash and dry the rabes.

Boil 4 quarts of water. Parboil broccoli rabe to reduce bitterness. Drain, and in a large pan, add broccoli to heated oil in which you’ve sautéed garlic and toss it until it begins to get soft.
About 4 minutes. Taste and season lightly with salt and red pepper flakes.

Broccoli Rabe is not regular broccoli.
It has a very strong, distinct flavor.
Lentil Soup

Ingredients

1 lb. dried brown lentils
1 large onion, chopped
2 stalks of celery, chopped
2 carrots, chopped
3 cloves of garlic, chopped
2 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
1-15 oz. can diced tomatoes
2 bay leaves
6 cups vegetable stock
1 lb. spinach or escarole
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. fresh ground black pepper
1 lb. ditali pasta (optional)

Preparation

In a large pot, sauté the garlic and onions until tender. Add lentils, vegetables and bay leaves, except the spinach or escarole. Cook for 2 more minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Add the broth and bring to a boil. Lower heat and simmer for an hour.

Add the spinach or escarole; cook for about 15 more minutes.

Remove the bay leaves.

If adding pasta, add cooked pasta to the individual servings of soup.
Sausage & Peppers

**Ingredients**

- 16 Italian sausage links (sweet)
- ½ cup olive oil
- 3 green bell peppers, sliced into strips
- 2 red bell peppers, sliced into strips
- 4 garlic cloves, diced
- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 1-15 oz. can crushed tomatoes
- 1 tbsp. dried oregano
- ½ tsp. red pepper flakes (optional)

**Preparation**

Brown sausage slowly in oil in a large pan. Cook until brown on all sides.

Add the onions and peppers stirring every half minute or so. Let them blacken a little bit. Once the onions and peppers soften, add the garlic and cook for another minute.

Use a wooden spoon to scrape the bottom of the pan and stir really well.

Add tomatoes, oregano and red pepper flakes (optional) and stir well again. Bring to a simmer then reduce the heat to low. Cover until the peppers are soft and the sausage is cooked through, about 25 minutes.

Sausage and peppers are best served on an Italian sub roll!
Struffoli

Ingredients

- 3 large eggs
- 1 tbsp. softened butter
- ¾ cup plus 1 tsp. sugar
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup honey
- Vegetable oil for frying
- Nonpareils

Preparation

Whisk together eggs, butter, and 1 tsp. sugar until frothy. Stir in baking powder then flour. When well combined, work the mixture into a soft dough with your hands.

When nicely dough-like, divide into 4 pieces. Lightly flour a work surface and roll each of the 4 pieces into a rope about the width of your finger and a foot long. Cut into 1” pieces, toss with enough flour to lightly dust. Important: shake off any excess flour or it will become gummy during the deep frying process.

Heat oil to 375° in a deep fryer. Working in handfuls, so you don’t lower the oil temp., fry the struffoli until golden brown. They’ll puff up as they fry.

Preparation continued

Remove from oil with a slotted spoon, letting excess oil drip back into fryer before putting struffoli on paper towels to drain/blot oil.

Combine honey and ½ cup sugar in a large saucepan over low heat. Stir constantly until sugar dissolves. Turn heat to very low, just to keep mixture warm.

Add the drained struffoli a few at a time, turning with a wooden spoon to coat evenly.

Transfer to large platter and mound into pyramid - shape with wet hands. Sprinkle with nonpareils and let stand for two hours, they will stick together but that’s part of the fun!
Grandma Tess’ Knots

Ingredients
Cookies:
3 eggs
2 cups SIFTED flour
1 stick margarine, melted
½ cup sugar
1 tsp. vanilla
3 tsp. baking powder
2 tbsp. milk

Icing:
Confectioners Sugar, water and colored nonpareils

Preparation
Cookies:
Beat eggs separately; add vanilla, milk and margarine to eggs. Add egg mixture to dry ingredients.

Keep adding SIFTED flour a little at a time to mixture until it’s no longer sticky and can be rolled in your hands.

Roll 4” sections of dough into tube shapes about ¼” thick, then make bee-hive shapes and place on greased or non-stick cookie tray.

Bake at 325° for 12 minutes or until bottoms are very light brown. Cool completely and ice.

Icing:
Add a bit of water to confectioners sugar until it’s a thick, smooth paste and ice. Top with nonpareils.

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