



August 2002 The Fresh Foods of Italy

When August comes around I think of tomatoes ripening on the vine and the pungent and refreshing smells of basil as it lays enveloping us in the summer heat. Green beans and sweet-shelled peas are in abundance with the summer squash and juicy sweet peppers. All this brings me to the fresh foods of Italy. I would like to share with you some easy ways to bring Italy to your table in the summer time.

Insalata caprese

This is a simple salad that is tasty and adds good colour to your table.

6 vine ripened tomatoes

-slice about 1/2" and pour off any excess juices.

3-4 balls fresh mozzarella

-slice about 1/2" thick and arrange alternating with the tomatoes.

Salt and freshly cracked pepper.

-sprinkle over the top.

2T extra virgin olive oil

-drizzle over the tomatoes and mozza.

15 basil leaves-torn and scatter over the top.

1/2t Balsamic Vinegar-sprinkle over the top just before serving.

Broiled tomatoes

4 large ripe tomatoes- cut in half horizontally

-place them on a baking sheet and broil skin side up for 2 mins.

2 cloves garlic-minced

1/4c extra virgin olive oil

1T Parsley-minced

-make a paste out of the last 3 ingreds and drizzle over the tomatoes.

Salt and fresh cracked pepper

-place back under the broiler and cook about 6 mins until the tomatoes are cooked.

This recipe can be substituted with basil and topped with a little grated parmesan.

Bagna Caoda

This is a great alternative to your regular veggies and dip. Can be served as an appetizer or and Hors D'oeuvre.

40 pieces of raw vegetables

-carrots, celery, green onions, fennel, cauliflower

-wash and cut into strips for dipping

Country style bread such as Ciabatta-torn into pieces.

Dip

3/4c Extra virgin Olive Oil

6 Cloves of garlic-minced

4oz Anchovies-minced

-cook over a low heat until the anchovies dissolve

6T butter

-add and melt, season with butter.

-keep the sauce warm in a fondue pot or over a tea candle.

The object is to dip the veg into the Bagna Caoda and to catch the drips with the bread.

Caponata

This can be served as a side dish, like a salad.

2 lbs Eggplant-cut into 1" cubes

-place in a colander and sprinkle with salt. Let drain for 30 mins. Rinse and squeeze dried with your hands.

1/3c Olive oil- heat in fry pan and brown the egg plant in batches adding more oil as needed. Drain on paper towel.

1/3c Olive oil

1 onion- roughly chopped

2 Celery stalks- sliced

-sauté until soft

1 red pepper-cut into strips

2T pine nuts

-add and sauté for 2 mins. Spoon off any excess oil.

2c Tomatoes- roughly chopped

1/4c water- add and simmer til quite thick and dry.

Freshly cracked pepper-season.

4T red wine vinegar

1T Sugar

2T Capers-rinsed

24 Green olives-pitted and halved

-add and cook for a couple of mins, then add the egg plant and cook for 5-6 mins. Remove from heat and allow to cool.

4T Parsley-finely chopped

-add and season with pepper.

Minestrone alla Genovese

This is one of the great Italian summer vegetable soup/stew recipes.

1c dried beans- I like to use a white bean like a great northern but a kidney bean will do just fine. If they are dried then soak them over night. Or canned beans will work well in a pinch and may be added at the end.

1/4c Butter-melt in a pot

1 onion-finely chopped

1 clove garlic- finely minced

1/4c parsley-finely chopped

2 sage leaves

4oz Pancetta- cubed, bacon will work quite well for this.

cook in the butter over low heat for about 10mins until the onion is soft and golden.

2 Celery stalks-halved and sliced

2 carrots- sliced

2 potatoes-peeled but left whole

add and cook 5 mins.

1t Tomato paste

2c Tomatoes- roughly chopped

8 Basil leaves

12c chicken or vegetable stock

-add with the beans, season with lots of freshly cracked pepper and simmer, covered for 1-1 1/2 hours.

-roughly break up the potatoes with a fork on the side of the pan.

2 Zucchini-sliced

1 1/2c shelled peas

1c green beans- broken in to 1" lengths

1/4 Cabbage-shredded

1 3/4c pasta- I like to use a small pasta.

-simmer until the pasta is *al dente*.

I like to serve this soup warm with a dollop of pesto on the top and some Parmesan.

Pesto

2 Garlic cloves
1/3c Pine nuts
2 1/2c Fresh basil-packed
4T parmesan
1/2c Extra virgin Olive Oil.

-the authentic way to make the pesto is to pound it in a mortar and pestle. The easy way to make the pesto is to mix in a food processor, adding the oil in a steady stream. This can be refrigerated when covered with a layer of olive oil.

Stuffed Sweet Peppers

3 red or yellow peppers-halved and seeds removed. Place on oiled baking sheet.

1T Olive oil
1 Onion-finely chopped
2 Cloves garlic-finely minced
-sauté for 5mins, then remove from heat.
3T Butter
2c fresh bread crumbs
-stir into onion mixture, transfer to a bowl.
1 Egg
1oz Parma-grated
2 Tomatoes- chopped and seeded.
5oz Mozzarella- grated
2T basil- chopped
3T water

add to onion mixture, stir well and season with salt and freshly cracked pepper.
-fill pepper halves with stuffing
3T extra virgin Olive oil
-drizzle on the peppers.
-bake for 40 mins, until the peppers are cooked through and the tops are golden.

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