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***Note:** Measurements are as accurate as possible.
Many of these recipes are passed down through
generations with instructions such as 'a pinch,
a handful, a sprinkling, throw in a bit of, taste to see ...'*



Dino Crocetti (Dean Martin)

Song List

(to cook by)

'Volare'

'In Napoli'

'Mambo Italiano'

'Everybody Loves Somebody'

'You're Nobody till Somebody Loves You'

'Memories are Made of This'

'Come Back to Sorrento'

'You Belong to Me'

'That's Amore'



Angry Spaghetti

Spaghetti all'Arrabbiata Calabrese

Calabria and Abruzzo are the two regions in Italy that most use chilli in dishes. Angry spaghetti or *spaghetti all'arrabbiata* is typically made with garlic, tomatoes and chillies, but some in Calabria also use *'nduja*, a spreadable preserve made from pork and hot chillies (*Piccante Calabrese* and others). The idea of 'angry spaghetti' is said to go back to the sixteenth century. While *arrabbiata* means 'angry', an even hotter sauce is *incazzate*, 'very angry'!

Ingredients

extra virgin olive oil

2 chillies (or more depending on how angry!), finely diced

3 garlic cloves, peeled and finely sliced

optional: 60g *'nduja* to taste, balsamic vinegar, *colatura di alici*

400g tin crushed tomatoes or fresh ripe cherry tomatoes, chopped

400g dried spaghetti

salt and pepper, to taste

optional: *Parmigiano*, *pecorino* or *caciocavallo* cheese, freshly grated, or fried breadcrumbs and parsley to sprinkle on top, brown sugar

Method

- Heat a generous pour of the oil in a large pan and fry the chillies until they start to caramelize, then add the garlic until golden (and *'nduja* if using).
- *Secret tip*: add a small dash each of balsamic vinegar and *colatura di alici* or *Worcestershire sauce* for a deeper savoury, umami background flavour.

- Add the tomatoes, salt to taste and cook until reduced (at least 30 minutes or more – the longer, the better the flavour).
- *Secret tip: add a teaspoon of brown sugar when adding the tomatoes.*
- Cook the pasta in plenty of boiling salted water until *al dente*.
- Drain, add to the sauce in the pan along with some pepper and mix well.

Traditionally this is served without cheese but if desired add some, freshly grated, or instead sprinkle fried breadcrumbs and parsley on top.

Moonstruck Eggs

Eggs cooked in bread in the pan

There are more than five dozen names for this humble dish – Egg in a Nest, *Uova nel Cestino*, Pirate’s Eye, *Gallina in un Nido* ... Moonstruck takes its name from the 1980s film where it featured.

Ingredients

2 free-range eggs
2 pieces bread
optional: butter (not margarine)
extra virgin olive oil
salt and pepper to taste

Method

- Cut one egg-sized hole in the middle of each slice of bread.
- *Secret tip: for extra flavour and decadence, butter each side of bread.*
- Gently heat a frying pan and add olive oil.
- Add the bread.
- Crack the eggs into the holes in the bread. (At this point, Nonna Gia secretly dusted a smidgin of ground chilli onto the yolks.)
- Turn once the egg whites have become bright white.
- As soon as the other side has lightly browned, they are ready to serve.
- Sprinkle with salt flakes and cracked black pepper.

Best served with a runny yolk to dip the crusts into.

*May also be served with fried red capsicum strips
and/or a sprinkling of chopped parsley.*

Melanzane Fritte

Eggplant slices crumbed and fried

Traditionally served as an antipasto, *melanzane fritte* are also a great side dish or even a light meal – golden brown and crispy outside while meltingly soft inside.

Ingredients

1–2 medium to large eggplants
flour (optional but helps the egg stick to the eggplant slices)
2 free-range eggs
salt and pepper
breadcrumbs
extra virgin olive oil
optional: lemon wedges, chopped parsley to serve

Method

- Cut the eggplants into slices about a centimetre thick. Take care not to cut the slices too thin or during frying they'll become overly soft and oily and not hold their shape. Also, if they're cut too thick, the outside will brown quickly leaving the inside raw.
- There is no need to first salt or soak the eggplant slices as these days they're mostly grown without the bitterness they may have had. Skipping this also makes for a quicker, easier prep.
- Prepare three bowls: the first with flour (if using); the second with the eggs, beaten and seasoned with salt; the third with breadcrumbs. (Like Nonna Gia you may secretly add a hint of ground chilli to the breadcrumbs if so desired, but just a pinch.)

- Pat each eggplant slice dry, then dredge in flour, followed by the egg and finally the breadcrumbs. Do so gently for the crumbs to stick, especially around the smooth skin.
- Shallow fry the crumbed slices in olive oil. Adjust the heat or add more oil as needed. *Secret tip: Not too hot, or the outsides brown before the insides cook, but not too low or the slices will be soggy and oily. Make sure they have lots of room in the pan.*
- Put the slices on a platter lined with paper towels or keep warm in the oven on a tray.
- Arrange the *Melanzane Fritte* on a serving platter, season lightly and serve warm.

Accompany with lemon wedges to squeeze over the eggplant slices (or a salad and other sides if a meal).

Caponata

Vegetables cooked agrodolce, sweet and sour

There are as many versions of *caponata* as there are cooks ... so it's said. The first written recipes date to the early eighteenth century and while it's famously Sicilian, other regions like Calabria also have versions of this *agrodolce* (sweet and sour) dish handed down through generations over many centuries in the tradition of cooking and passing on family history, no two recipes quite alike.

Ingredients

2–3 eggplants depending on size

2 capsicums (red or yellow are best for sweetness)

2 red onions

1–2 zucchini

3 celery sticks

garlic

extra virgin olive oil

balsamic (or red or white wine) vinegar

2 tbs brown sugar

salt and pepper to season

secret ingredients: lemon or orange zest, smoked paprika, chilli, colatura di alici

optional: olives, chopped fresh parsley, anchovies, pine nuts, tomatoes ...

Method

- Chop the eggplants into cubes about the size of dice and the other vegetables as desired (they will cook down so a little thicker works best).
- To a large pan on a medium to high heat, add a generous glug of olive oil for shallow frying.
- Add the capsicum and red onion, then once caramelised add the zucchini, celery, eggplant and garlic. Fry until browned and soft, stirring occasionally, adjusting the heat and adding more olive oil as necessary.
- Add a good splash of vinegar, let it reduce then add salt, pepper and brown sugar, stirring for it to dissolve. Have a taste. It should be *agrodolce*, sweet and sour, so adjust vinegar and sugar if necessary.
- *Secret tip: 1 tsp smoked paprika adds depth, as does a small dash of colatura di alici or Worcestershire sauce for that savoury, umami flavour.* (This is perhaps when Nonna Gia would have sprinkled in some of her ground chilli.)
- Turn down heat, stir in lemon/orange zest and simmer for at least 10–15 minutes.

This is a dish served hot, cold or at room temperature, as an antipasto, salad, relish or side dish. Best served the next day as flavours develop.

Will keep in the fridge for several days.

Crostoli in Cioccolato

Pastry ribbons dipped in chocolate

For centuries these have been popular throughout Italy and across Europe and Asia. In Italy, they're traditionally eaten at *Carnevale*, when towns celebrate their history, and of course different regions call them different names – *chiacchiere*, *cenci*, *sfogliatelle*, *nodi*, *bugie*, *ali d'angelo*, *frappe*, *cioffe*, *galani*, *sfrappole* ... Beware, for *chiacchiere*, or 'rumours', can be addictive. They are best if light and flaky but still crunchy with some substance.

Ingredients

450g plain flour (plus extra for kneading)
3 free-range eggs
50g butter
100g caster sugar (raw, unbleached is best)
50ml Marsala (grappa or brandy may be substituted)
1 tsp vanilla bean extract
grape seed oil or oil of choice for frying (a generous amount)
dark couverture chocolate for melting
optional: a little powdered chilli
icing or caster sugar to sprinkle

Method

- Sift the flour into a mixing bowl. Make a well in the middle and add the eggs, butter, sugar, Marsala and vanilla, mixing thoroughly to create a dough.

- Turn the dough out onto a floured surface and knead until smooth, dusting extra flour across surface to prevent sticking as needed. (Dough should be soft, not sticky.)
- Use a rolling pin or a pasta machine to roll the dough to lasagne sheet thinness.
- Cut into strips roughly 4–5 cm wide, or to your liking. (A fluted pastry/pasta wheel cutter gives a crinkled edge.) Don't let the dough dry out before frying – if possible, cover it with a tea towel.
- Heat the oil in a deep frying pan or saucepan (a wok also works well!). The oil must be hot so the pastries cook quickly and don't absorb too much oil. Fry several strips at a time until golden without overcrowding or the temperature will drop.
- Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on absorbent kitchen paper.
- Sprinkle with caster sugar while still hot, or allow to cool completely then cover with sifted icing sugar.

Optional extra: Dipping the *crostoli* ends in chocolate

- Place a saucepan about a quarter filled with water on the stove.
- Break or chop the couverture chocolate into pieces. Place it in a heatproof bowl on top of the saucepan.
- Bring the water to a simmer, then turn off the heat and let the chocolate sit until melted before stirring it gently. (A microwave risks burning the chocolate.)
- *Optional: stir a little powdered chilli into the chocolate like Nonna Gia did.*
- Remove the bowl of melted chocolate from the water with care.
- Dip ends of *crostoli* in chocolate and place to dry on greaseproof paper.
- When dry, sprinkle with icing sugar and serve.

Best served at once or kept in an airtight container (rather than Nonna Gia's saucepan!). That's if any are left after coffee and chatter ...

Pizzette Fritte

Little fried pizzas

With their origins in Naples, *pizzette fritte* are said to be the way pizzas were first made. Likely served plain straight from the frypan, they were a street food for the poorest residents. The saying from the time, *il mangio oggi e la pago tra otto giorni* (I'll eat it today and pay for it in eight days), meant while the hunger was resolved for the time being, they had to find a way to pay later. (Although some of today's decadent versions might give rise to a different interpretation!)

Ingredients

2 tsp yeast (7g)
2 tsp sugar
100ml warm water
500g flour
300ml (1–1¼ cups) tepid water, or as much as needed to form the dough
a generous pinch of salt
olive oil for frying
toppings: basil pesto, prosciutto and *Parmigiano*; or tomatoes, basil leaves and torn fresh mozzarella, olive oil ...

Method

- To make the dough, mix yeast in 100ml tepid water with sugar and leave for several minutes until it begins to bubble and foam a little (showing the yeast is alive).

- Pile the flour on a clean surface and make a well in the middle.
- Add the yeast-and-water mixture and oil into the middle, and begin to incorporate flour by drawing some from the sides into the well and mixing.
- Start adding the tepid water, a bit at a time, and incorporate more flour, until a dough is formed. (It should be elastic and soft, even moist, but firm enough to work with.)
- Knead the dough by hand for a good 10–15 minutes to form a ball with a springy consistency (poke the dough and it should spring back, leaving no trace).
- Rest the dough ball in a deep bowl covered with a tea towel for about 2 hours. Lightly flouring or greasing the dough helps it to rise and prevents it sticking to the bowl.
- The dough should double or even treble in volume.
- *Secret tip: punch it down and let it rise a number of times. The longer it is allowed to rise, the tastier it will be.*
- Once ready, form the dough into balls about the size of hen eggs.
- Flatten each out into a small round, leaving a slight lip around the edges, and fry in hot oil until lightly browned on both sides, flipping as required. (It will brown further in the oven later on.)
- Place them on a rack (or paper towels) to drain then transfer to a baking tray.
- Add favourite pizza toppings and season with salt and pepper.
- Put in a hot oven (200°C) for about 5 minutes just to melt the cheese (don't leave in too long or the *pizzette fritte* will harden).

Must be served fresh and hot straightaway.

Baccalà alla Calabrese

Salted cod Calabrese-style

Baccalà is cod that has been preserved in salt, giving the fish a flaky texture with an intense but never fishy flavour. In Italy, it's a much-celebrated dish especially at Easter and Christmas Eve, although according to southern Italian legend there is a different way to prepare it for all 365 days of the year. (Just as there are as many varying *Baccalà alla Calabrese* recipes!)

Ingredients

extra virgin olive oil (enough to coat the pan)
1 onion, chopped
1–2 cloves garlic, chopped
1kg baccalà, rehydrated – soak for 1–3 days or at least the day before, changing the water every two hours to remove the salt.
a dash of white wine
a pinch of crushed hot chilli (fresh or dried), or more if desired!
a handful of ripe cherry tomatoes, roughly chopped
a dozen or so Calabrese olives (usually green and flavoured with fennel and chilli)
2 bay leaves
a handful of fresh basil leaves, torn by hand, not cut (to prevent them going black)
2 cups chicken or vegetable stock
2 medium potatoes, peeled, cut about dice-sized or chunkier if preferred
salt and pepper to taste (keep in mind *baccalà* imparts some salt to the dish)

Method

- Drain the cod from the water it has been soaking in and gently pat it dry before cutting it into bite-sized pieces. You may then also flour these if desired. (Best to handle the cod gently to avoid it breaking.)
- In a large pot, fry the onions in the olive oil until brown then add in the garlic and floured pieces of cod and fry.
- Add the wine and let it cook down for a few minutes then add in the chilli, tomatoes, olives, bay leaves and basil and cook on medium heat for about 10 minutes. Gently stir occasionally to prevent it from sticking.
- Add the stock and potatoes. Simmer until potatoes are tender. (Alternately the cod may be added at this step with the potatoes, and water instead of stock used – although stock imparts more flavour.)
- Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.

May be served with fresh bread, rice, polenta or salad.

Mixed Grill

Twentieth-century Greek café style

In cities and towns across Australia, cafés run by Greek migrants flourished from the 1920s to the 1960s. The ‘Mixed Grill’ was one of the most popular items on the menu, cooked ‘American style’ to appeal to British–Australian palates of the time.

Ingredients (per person)

1 lamb chop
1 sausage (good quality meat with no cereal fillers)
1 steak (cut of choice)
½ a tomato
1 free-range egg
1–2 bacon rashers (fat left on)
extra virgin olive oil
salt and pepper to taste
optional: lamb’s fry or liver

Method

- Pour in some oil and heat a large frying pan.
- Add the sausage and the chop (which take longest to cook).
- After a few minutes add the steak and cook to liking (well done if old style!).
- Add the bacon and cook until crispy.
- *Optional*: when sausage, chop and steak are almost ready, add lamb’s fry.

- Next, add the tomato and crack the egg in to cook, leaving the yolk runny.

*Best served on a thick ceramic plate with egg sunny-side up,
salt and pepper to taste, toast or buttered bread,
and favourite sauces or condiments.*

Egg Flip

Classic milk bar style

Egg flips have been around for centuries and became a popular milk bar drink after the advent of refrigeration. Sought out by manual labourers especially and as a meal replacement or ‘pick me up’ for those ill with no appetite – don’t tell older children there’s raw egg in it and they’ll love it.

Note: Do not give raw eggs to pregnant women, young children, babies or older adults.

Ingredients

1½ cups milk (full cream works best)
1 free-range egg
dash of vanilla extract (caramel also works well)
2 scoops vanilla ice cream

Adjust ingredients to own taste or preferred milkshake thickness.

Method

- Combine all ingredients in a blender or milkshake mixer.
- Make sure to blend well to ensure the egg is thoroughly mixed in.

Serve straightaway with a paper straw in a tall glass or in an anodised milkshake container.

Pesche con Crema

Peaches with cream, or are they?

Traditionally for weddings and festivals, especially in Abruzzo and Calabria, these peach cakes are a trick to the eye, to mimic real peaches. This recipe seems complex but is more time-consuming.

Ingredients

Custard cream:

- 2 cups full cream milk
- zest of 1 lemon (best in large strips)
- 4 free-range egg yolks
- seeds of 1 vanilla bean, scraped out (or ½ tsp vanilla bean paste)
- ¾ cup sugar
- ¼ cup plain flour

Cake dough:

- 3¾ cups plain flour
- 1 tbs baking powder
- 3 free-range eggs
- ¾ cup sugar
- ¾ cup milk
- 115g cooking butter (melted and cooled)
- zest of 1 orange (finely grated)

To assemble peaches:

- ½ cup Italian *Alcherme*s or *Maraschino* liqueur (or red *Campari*)
- red and yellow food colouring (natural if possible)

- fine sugar for coating (1–2 cups)
- fresh mint leaves

Method

Custard cream:

- In a saucepan, heat the milk, lemon zest and vanilla to a simmer. Turn off heat and leave to infuse.
- In the meantime, in a large bowl whisk egg yolks and sugar until thick and pale yellow; add flour and whisk until well combined.
- Discard lemon zest from milk and slowly whisk hot milk into egg mixture.
- Return to saucepan and on a medium heat stir until cream thickens and starts to boil.
- Transfer custard cream to a large bowl and cover with plastic wrap, pressing down on the surface to prevent a skin from forming. Let cool completely.

Cake dough:

- In a large bowl, stir together the flour and baking powder.
- In another large bowl, whisk the eggs and then add in the sugar whisking further to combine.
- Into the eggs and sugar, whisk the milk, melted butter (cooled) and orange zest until smooth.
- Gradually add flour mixture, mixing with a fork, until the dough is smooth and firm. Let it rest for 5 minutes.
- Preheat oven to 175°C. Line two baking trays with baking paper.
- Take a good tablespoon of the dough and roll it firmly in hands to make a smooth round ball about the size of a walnut. Repeat, keeping all the balls about the same size. Place the balls on prepared baking trays, spacing them a couple of centimetres apart. Flatten tops slightly with fingertips.
- Transfer to oven and bake for about 15 minutes until bottoms are lightly browned and tops are still pale. Transfer to a rack and let cool slightly.

To assemble peaches:

- While the cakes are still warm, use a small, sharp knife to cut a circle about the size of a coin on the bottom (flat) side of each, taking care not to crack the edges. Use the tip of the knife to scrape out enough crumbs to make a hollow to hold about 1 teaspoon custard cream. Set cakes aside.
- Pour liqueur in a small bowl. Add red and yellow food colouring to create a shade of peach. Fill a shallow bowl with sugar. Set aside.
- Fill each hollowed-out cake half with a spoonful of custard cream. Sandwich two together so the filling comes just to the edge, taking care not to break.
- Dip a pastry brush in coloured liqueur and brush it all over the outside of the 'peach' then roll it in sugar to coat. Repeat process with remaining cake halves, liqueur and sugar.
- Store in a sealed container in the refrigerator and chill overnight.

Just before serving, in the top of each 'peach' insert a fresh mint leaf to resemble a leaf and the trickery is complete.

Lasagne con Melanzane

Lasagne with eggplant layers

Lasagne, considered Italy's first pasta dish, was cooked by the Romans long before Marco Polo is said to have brought pasta to Italy from the East in the thirteenth century. While other countries also claim it, lasagne has been embraced, varied and perfected by Italians over centuries and is synonymous with Italy. The original dish used pasta sheets but not tomatoes. This recipe has eggplant layers and is also delicious without the beef for a lighter or vegetarian version.

Ingredients

extra virgin olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
2–3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
optional: 500g beef mince
optional secret tip: paprika, balsamic vinegar, *colatura di alici*
a handful of basil leaves, torn not cut (to stop them going black)
a handful of parsley, chopped
400g tin diced tomatoes
400g tin crushed tomatoes
1 bottle of tomato passata
salt, pepper
brown sugar
1 eggplant, sliced into rounds about a centimetre thick
400g grated cheddar cheese
250g dried lasagne pasta sheets

Method

- Preheat oven to 180°C. Heat some olive oil in a saucepan and add onion. Cook at a high heat until browned and caramelised but not burnt.
- Add mince (if using) and garlic, and cook at high heat stirring with a wooden spoon until caramelised brown and the juices have disappeared.
- *Secret tip: add ground paprika and a small dash each of balsamic vinegar and colatura di alici or Worcestershire sauce for a deeper savoury, umami background flavour.*
- Add the herbs, tinned tomatoes, bottle of passata and salt and pepper to taste. Reduce heat to medium. Simmer for at least half an hour until sauce thickens, turning down the heat if necessary so it doesn't boil.
- *Secret tip: simmer on a low heat for several hours for a more traditional and tastier sauce.*
- Into a large baking tray greased with olive oil place the pieces of eggplant, sliced into rounds about a centimetre thick. (It is okay to overlap them slightly to fit or use two trays if necessary, depending on the size of the eggplant.) Brush the tops of the eggplant slices with olive oil and season with a little salt and paprika (if using). Bake in oven while sauce continues simmering for about 20 minutes or until eggplant appears soft and cooked.
- To assemble: Grease a large, rectangular lasagne dish with olive oil.
- *Secret tip: a little skimmed sauce in the bottom also helps.*
- Place a layer of the dried pasta sheets over the bottom on the dish (carefully breaking them to fit if necessary). Spoon a layer of sauce mixture over the top, covering all the pasta. Spread a layer of the oven-baked eggplant slices over the top. Sprinkle over a layer of cheese. Repeat layers. Top with remaining sauce and cheese and perhaps a sprinkling of chopped parsley.

- Bake for 40–45 minutes or until pasta is *al dente* and the cheese melted and golden. (Stick a knife in the centre to check the pasta is cooked through.)

After taking it out of the oven, let the lasagne stand for 5–10 minutes and it will be easier to slice and serve.

Zippuli

Calabrian dialect for zeppole

There are many variations (both dialect spellings and recipes) of *zippuli*, a Calabrian word meaning fried dough. Savoury or sweet, they are traditionally served for the *Festa di San Giuseppe* (St Joseph's Day), Christmas, New Year and other celebrations, depending on the town. Mainly cooked in southern Italy, *zippuli* also have an Arabic Mediterranean ancestry.

Ingredients

1kg plain flour

14g (2 sachets) dried yeast

½ tsp salt

750ml (3 cups) tepid water, approximately

olive oil or oil of choice for frying

12 sun-dried tomato halves or anchovy fillets (or six of each) or whatever filling you prefer. A surprise *Piccante Calabrese* chilli or two is optional!

Dough resting time 1–1½ hours

Method

- In a very large bowl, mix the flour, yeast and salt and make a well in the centre.
- Add some of the water into the well a little at a time, gathering flour with your hand as you do and using as much water as

you need until all the flour has been incorporated into a sticky dough. (If you accidentally use too much water just add in some flour, a bit at a time, to get the right consistency.)

- Scrape down the sides and leave the dough in the centre of the bowl.
- Cover the bowl with a large tea towel and set aside in a warm place for 1–1½ hours or until the mixture doubles in size.
- Heat the oil in a large, deep saucepan or wok over medium heat. To test if the oil is ready, drop a small piece of dough into the oil and if it sizzles immediately, the oil is ready.
- *Secret tip: Beware of letting the olive oil get so hot it starts to smoke (or use a higher heat oil like grape seed or macadamia instead).*
- Dampen hands with water and take a lump of dough (about 2 tablespoons), stretch it between your fingers and place sun-dried tomato or anchovy fillet lengthways in the centre. Twist the dough to completely encase it, then gently place into the hot oil.
- Repeat with the remaining dough and fillings, making sure you don't overcrowd the pan. Cook the *zippuli*, turning regularly for 3–4 minutes or until golden all over.
- Drain in a colander lined with paper towel and serve warm.

For a dessert version, skip the fillings and simply fry then sprinkle with sugar or honey. Both versions most delicious served fresh and warm.

Buon appetito!