

Gnocchi with Marinara Sauce

Soft Italian dumplings known as gnocchi are often made with potatoes. They're delicious paired with the same sauces used for pasta, such as the marinara sauce called for here. The gnocchi can be cooked in advance; after removing them from the boiling water, transfer to a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking. Drain the gnocchi, then cover and refrigerate. Just before serving, warm the marinara sauce, add the gnocchi and cook until heated through.

Put the potatoes and 1 cup water in a pressure cooker. Cover and cook on high for 5 minutes. Peel the potatoes while still hot. Pass the potato flesh through a ricer set over a large bowl.

Meanwhile, in a large pot over high heat, bring 6 quarts salted water to a boil. Line a baking sheet with a lightly floured kitchen towel or paper towels.

Mound the potatoes on a lightly floured work surface and make a well in the center. Pour the eggs into the well. Season the potatoes with salt, nutmeg and white pepper. Sprinkle 1 cup of the flour over the potatoes. Using a fork, gradually blend the eggs with the potato mixture. Using your hands, mix the dough, adding more flour as needed to form a firm but moist dough; do not overwork. The mixing process should take no more than 5 minutes.

Divide the dough into 6 equal pieces. Roll each piece into a rope about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick, flouring the work surface as needed so the dough is not too sticky. Cut each rope into 1-inch pieces and gently roll each piece on a gnocchi ridger. Place the gnocchi on the prepared baking sheet.

Meanwhile, in a large sauté pan over medium heat, warm the marinara sauce.

Working in batches, cook the gnocchi in the boiling water for 5 to 6 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the gnocchi to the pan with the sauce and toss to combine. Serve immediately. Serves 6.

Williams-Sonoma Kitchen

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Ingredients for Gnocchi with Marinara Sauce

4 large russet potatoes, about 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. total

2 eggs, lightly beaten

1 tsp. salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. freshly ground white pepper

2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups all-purpose flour, or as needed

Marinara sauce for serving (see recipe in brochure)

Tips for Making Meatballs *(continued)*

- **Mixing the ingredients:** Before adding the meat, first blend the other ingredients together so they will be fully mixed.
- **Be gentle when mixing:** If you overwork the meat mixture, your meatballs will be dense and tough. After adding the meat, gently incorporate all the other ingredients into it.
- **Forming the meatballs:** Lightly dampen your hands with a little water before shaping the meatballs. This prevents the meat from sticking to your hands and allows for easier shaping.
- **Check the seasonings:** Create one small meatball first and quickly fry and taste it, then adjust the seasonings as needed. Do this before you begin to shape all of the meatballs.
- **Brown the meatballs:** Before adding the meatballs to the sauce, brown them on the stovetop or in the oven to produce an appealing caramelized exterior.

Tips for Making Meatballs

Making meatballs is a fun kitchen project that even young children can help with. These tips will help ensure that your meatballs are tender and full of flavor.

- **Grind your own meat:** Whether you use only beef or a blend of several meats, you'll enjoy fresher and more flavorful results if you grind your own meat. Buying a meat grinder is an economical way to enjoy ground meats, rather than purchasing pre-ground meats. It's also more healthful to grind your own.

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Ingredients for Spaghetti and Meatballs

1 Tbs. olive oil

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup minced yellow onion

2 garlic cloves, minced

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup coarse fresh bread crumbs

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk

1 egg, beaten

2 Tbs. minced fresh flat-leaf parsley

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. dried oregano

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. kosher salt, plus more, to taste

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. freshly ground pepper

1 lb. ground beef round

$\frac{1}{2}$ lb. ground pork

$\frac{1}{2}$ lb. ground veal

6 cups marinara sauce (see recipe in brochure)

1 lb. spaghetti

Grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese for serving

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Technique Class: Italian Comfort Food

There is no exact definition for comfort food, as it means something different to every one of us. It might conjure up memories of cold days when you savored steaming bowls of tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches. Or perhaps it's an ethnic cuisine that fills you with feelings of warmth and nurturing, feeding both body and soul.

Italian comfort foods are some of our nation's most popular. Most of us have wonderful memories of big bowls of spaghetti and meatballs and finally learning to twirl those glorious strands of pasta on a fork. Many families frequented their local pizzeria, where you could bite into the crisp crust of a calzone and enjoy the richness of the cheese and other savory fillings. This class features some popular recipes for Italian comfort foods that you can prepare at home for friends and family.

Spaghetti and Meatballs

In many homes, Monday-night supper calls for comfort food, as folks try to ease back into the workweek. A heaping plate of spaghetti crowned with plump meatballs is the perfect dish to serve. Make a double batch of marinara sauce, so you'll have a container in the freezer, ready at a moment's notice.

Preheat an oven to 400°F. Lightly oil a rimmed baking sheet.

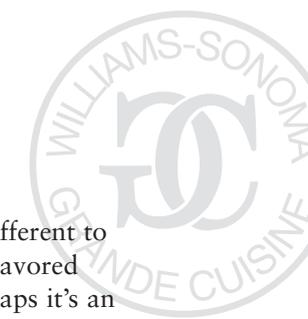
In a small fry pan over medium heat, warm the olive oil. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 4 minutes. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Transfer to a large bowl and let cool to lukewarm.

Meanwhile, put the bread crumbs in a small bowl. Add the milk and let stand for 5 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a sieve and drain, pressing hard on the bread to extract the excess milk. Add the soaked bread crumbs, egg, parsley, oregano, the 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt and the pepper to the onion mixture and mix well. Add the ground beef, pork and veal and mix with your hands until just combined. Do not overmix or the meatballs will be dense.

Using wet hands, shape the mixture into 18 meatballs and arrange on the prepared baking sheet. Bake until the tops are browned, about 20 minutes, then turn the meatballs over and continue baking until cooked through, about 15 minutes more. Remove from the oven.

In a large saucepan over medium heat, bring the marinara sauce to a simmer. Add the meatballs. Discard any fat on the baking sheet, add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup boiling water to the sheet, and use a wooden spatula to scrape up the browned bits. Pour the liquid into the marinara sauce and stir. Simmer until the flavors are blended, about 20 minutes.

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Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the spaghetti and stir occasionally until the water returns to a boil. Cook according to the package instructions until al dente. Drain in a colander. Return the pasta to the pot. Add about half of the sauce to the pasta, without the meatballs, and toss to combine. Divide the pasta among individual pasta bowls, and top each serving with more sauce and meatballs. Serve immediately and pass cheese alongside. Serves 6.

 Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Comfort Food*, by Rick Rodgers (Oxmoor House, 2009).

Ricotta and Spinach Calzones

Filled with a mixture of creamy ricotta and sautéed spinach and onions, these calzones are fun to eat out of hand. Or, if you like, outfit diners with knives and forks and serve the calzones with a side of tangy marinara sauce for dipping, just like you might find at a classic Italian-American pizzeria.

You can fill a calzone with just about any combination of meats, cheese and vegetables that you’d put on a pizza. Be sure to cook the meats and vegetables before using.

The night before serving, prepare the pizza dough and refrigerate. Remove the dough from the refrigerator 1 to 2 hours before forming the calzones.

To make the filling, rinse the spinach but do not dry it. In a large fry pan over medium heat, warm the 2 Tbs. olive oil. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until translucent, about 4 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the spinach, cover and cook until tender, about 3 minutes. Drain the spinach mixture through a sieve, pressing gently to remove excess liquid. Transfer to a bowl, add the Parmigiano-Reggiano, mozzarella and ricotta cheeses, and mix well. Season with salt and pepper.

Position the racks in the center and lower third of an oven and preheat to 400°F. Oil 2 rimmed baking sheets.

Divide the pizza dough into 6 equal portions and shape each portion into a ball. Place the balls on a work surface and cover with a kitchen towel. Place 1 ball on a floured work surface and roll out into a round 7 inches in diameter. Brush the edges lightly with water. Place one-sixth of the cheese mixture on half of the round, leaving a 1-inch border uncovered. Fold the dough over so the edges meet, then crimp with a fork. Pierce the top of the calzone with the fork and transfer to a prepared baking sheet. Repeat with the remaining dough and filling, putting 3 calzones on each baking sheet. Brush the calzones with olive oil.

Bake the calzones until golden brown, about 20 minutes. Transfer to wire racks and let cool for 10 minutes. Serve warm. Makes 6 calzones.

 Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Comfort Food*, by Rick Rodgers (Oxmoor House, 2009).

Spaghetti with Stuffed Meatballs

These hearty meatballs are each stuffed with a cube of mozzarella cheese, which melts inside as the meatballs cook. When preparing the meat mixture, use your hands to gently mix the ground beef and other ingredients until just combined; do not overmix or the meatballs will be dense.

In a large sauté/simmer pan over medium heat, warm 1 Tbs. of the olive oil. Add the onion, season with salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 10 minutes. Add the garlic and cook, stirring constantly, for 1 minute. Let cool.

In a bowl, combine the bread and buttermilk. Add the ground beef, onion mixture, parsley, thyme, the 2½ tsp. salt and the ½ tsp. pepper and mix with your hands until cohesive. Form the mixture into 10 large meatballs. Stuff a mozzarella cheese cube into the center of each one, then reroll the meatball.

In the same pan over medium-high heat, warm the remaining 2 Tbs. olive oil. Working in 2 batches, brown the meatballs, about 8 minutes per batch. Transfer to a plate. Reduce the heat to medium, pour the tomato sauce into the pan and add the meatballs. Simmer, turning the meatballs once, until they are cooked through, 25 to 30 minutes.

Divide the spaghetti among individual bowls and top with the sauce and meatballs. Serve immediately and and pass Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese alongside. Serves 5 or 6.

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Marinara Sauce

Made with canned tomatoes, this sauce is perfect when fresh tomatoes are not in season. Use the sauce when preparing our recipes for gnocchi and spaghetti with meatballs, or simply toss the sauce with your favorite pasta.

Place the tomatoes in a tomato press or food mill set over a bowl and pass them through the press or mill. Repeat as needed until all of the large pieces of tomatoes are crushed. Alternatively, pour the tomatoes into a large bowl and crush them between your fingers. Set aside.

In a large, heavy nonreactive saucepan over medium heat, warm the olive oil. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute.

Add the wine and bring to a boil. Add the crushed tomatoes and their puree, the red pepper flakes and bay leaf. Increase the heat to medium-high and bring to a boil, stirring frequently. Reduce the heat to low and simmer, stirring occasionally to prevent scorching and adding water if the sauce thickens too quickly, about 1½ hours. During the last 15 minutes of simmering, stir in the basil.

Discard the bay leaf. Use the sauce immediately, or let cool, cover and refrigerate for up to 4 days or freeze for up to 3 months. Makes about 6 cups.

 Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Comfort Food*, by Rick Rodgers (Oxmoor House, 2009).

Ingredients for Spaghetti with Stuffed Meatballs

3 Tbs. olive oil

1 yellow onion, finely diced

Kosher salt, to taste, plus 2½ tsp.

3 garlic cloves, minced

2 cups torn pieces crustless white bread (½-inch pieces)

½ cup buttermilk

2 lb. ground beef

¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1 tsp. finely chopped fresh thyme

½ tsp. freshly ground pepper

5 oz. mozzarella cheese, cut into 1-inch cubes

7 cups tomato sauce or marinara sauce (see recipe in brochure)

1½ lb. spaghetti, cooked and drained

Grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese for serving

Ingredients for Marinara Sauce

2 cans (each 28 oz.) whole San Marzano tomatoes

3 Tbs. olive oil

1 large yellow onion, finely diced

2 to 4 garlic cloves, minced

½ cup hearty red wine

¼ tsp. red pepper flakes

1 bay leaf

¼ cup chopped fresh basil

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