

Ricotta Gnocchi

1 ½ pounds fresh ricotta
1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more as needed
2 large eggs, beaten
1 tablespoon chopped Italian parsley
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
Olive oil

Put the ricotta in a fine sieve over a bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least 8 hours or overnight to drain. The cheese will become firmer and drier.

To make the gnocchi, in a medium bowl, combine the drained ricotta, flour, eggs, parsley, salt, pepper and nutmeg and stir together gently until a soft dough forms. Add a little more flour if the dough is sticky when poked with a fingertip.

Dust your hands with flour and shape the dough into balls, using about two tablespoons of dough for each one. Place the gnocchi onto a baking sheet lined with a lightly floured kitchen towel (or paper towel).

Bring 6 quarts of water to a boil in a large pot and add 2 tablespoons of salt. Set up an ice bath next to the stovetop.

Gently slip only as many gnocchi at a time as will float freely into the boiling water, stirring gently with a wooden spoon to separate them. Cook until they rise to the surface (approx. 7 minutes). Test one for doneness by cutting into the centre – it should be the same colour and consistency all the way through. Scoop them out of the pot with a wire skimmer as soon as they are cooked and transfer them to the ice bath.

As soon as the gnocchi are cooled, drain and transfer them to an airtight container. Toss them with olive oil to coat and refrigerate them until ready to cook.

When ready to cook, bring the same pot of 6 quarts of salted water to a boil again and add the gnocchi back into the water. Cook until they float to the top. Drain and toss into the pan of sausage ragu. Toss and coat the gnocchi with the sauce and serve immediately, topped with grated pecorino.

“Weeds” with Sausage (Gramigne con Salsiccia)

The “weeds” in question are kind of like a slightly unravelled phone cord, with a great texture that the sausage ragu just barely clings to, creating a very full mouthfeel. If you cannot find gramigne (and, Sean, I haven’t), use short fusilli or rotelle.

1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 large onion, diced
1 pound hot Italian pork sausage, removed from casings
6 tablespoons tomato paste
½ cup dry white wine
½ cup whole milk
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
1 pound gramigne or fusilli
Freshly grated parmigiano-reggiano

1. In a 12- to 14-inch sauté pan, heat the olive oil and butter over high heat. Add the onion and cook until soft and golden brown, 6 to 8 minutes. Add the sausage and cook, stirring occasionally and draining the excess fat if necessary, until the sausage is very brown and somewhat crisp, about 10 minutes.
2. Add the tomato paste and cook, stirring often, until a deep rust colour, about 8 minutes. Add the white wine and cook, stirring frequently, until the alcohol has evaporated. Stir in the milk, season with salt and pepper to taste, and reduce the heat to a simmer. Cook for 15 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, bring 6 quarts of water to a boil in a large pot, and add 2 tablespoons of salt. Drop the pasta into the boiling water and cook until just al dente.
4. Scoop out about ¼ cup of the pasta cooking water and set aside. Drain the pasta. Add the pasta to the sauce and toss together over high heat for about 1 minute to coat everything evenly, adding a splash or two of the reserved pasta water, if necessary, to loosen the sauce.
5. Divide the pasta among six warmed pasta bowls, top with grated cheese and serve immediately.

From *Molto Italiano*, by Mario Batali

Yield: 6 servings