

SUSAN WIGGS

summer
by the sea

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Summer by the Sea

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Caponata

This has an excellent flavor and makes a very nice presentation on a perfect leaf of lettuce, not that Robert and Sal ever gave a hoot about presentation. And it's even quite low in calories, not that guys care about that, either. Serve this as a traditional antipasto with a good crusty Italian bread and a glass of chilled Pinot Grigio.

Peel and dice an eggplant, toss with salt, put in a colander and drain for at least a half hour. Then heat up a heavy skillet and add 1/4 cup olive oil, a small onion, chopped, and a stick of celery, also chopped. Add the eggplant and sauté. Finally, add three chopped tomatoes, three minced anchovies, a pinch of sugar, 1/4 cup wine vinegar and a spoonful of capers (the best ones come from Pantelleria Island). If your family likes olives, add some of those, too, along with a pinch of red pepper flakes. Simmer for ten minutes. Cool, then store overnight in a glass container. For a smoother spreading consistency, you can whirl the mixture in the food processor, but don't overdo it. Things that are too smooth lose their character.



Romaine and Gorgonzola Salad

Wash two heads of romaine lettuce in cold water, discarding the tough outer leaves. Shake dry and tear into bite-sized pieces. Add basil sprigs and cherry tomatoes, cut in half. Right before serving, toss the lettuce with Gorgonzola vinaigrette.

Gorgonzola Vinaigrette

1/4 cup white wine vinegar + 1/4 cup apple juice

1 Tablespoon minced shallots

2 Tablespoons mustard

2 teaspoons chopped basil

2 Tablespoons toasted pine nuts (pinones)

1/4 cup walnut oil + 3 Tablespoons olive oil

2 Tablespoons crumbled Gorgonzola—preferably the aged variety from Monferrato

freshly ground black pepper

Put everything in a jar and shake well. Makes about 1 cup. Store in the fridge for up to 5 days.



Ricotta Cheese Sugar Cookies

1 cup softened butter
2 cups sugar
1 carton full-fat ricotta cheese
2 eggs
3 teaspoons vanilla (the kind from Mexico is best)
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
4 cups flour

For the glaze:

1 cup powdered sugar
2-4 Tablespoons milk
2 drops almond extract (optional)
sprinkles

Preheat oven to 350° F. Mix cookie ingredients to form a sticky dough. Drop by teaspoonfuls on an ungreased cookie sheet. Bake 10 minutes or until the bottoms turn golden brown (the tops will stay white). Transfer to wire racks to cool. To make the glaze, stir milk a few drops at a time, along with the almond extract if desired, into the powdered sugar in a saucepan. Stir over low heat to create a glaze. Drizzle over cooled cookies and top with colored sprinkles. Makes 3-4 dozen cookies.




Pasta Fazool, from the region of Puglia

Warm 4 Tablespoons of fruity extra-virgin olive oil in a large saucepan and gently sauté 1/2 onion, chopped, a peeled and chopped carrot, a rib of chopped celery and some minced garlic. Open a can of cannellini or Jackson Wonder beans and drain, then add to the vegetables along with 4 chopped plum tomatoes, a pinch of fresh rosemary and 2 cups boiling water. Bring back to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for thirty minutes. Transfer about half of the beans and their liquid to a food processor and process to a thick purée.

Stir the purée back into the beans. Add 1/4 pound of ziti (or other pasta) and another 1-2 cups of boiling water to the beans in the pot. Cook, stirring constantly, until the pasta is tender, about 10-15 minutes. Remove from heat. Add salt and lots of black pepper to taste.

Serve in warm bowls, garnished with a drizzle of olive oil, a sprinkle of chopped flat-leaf parsley and some parmigiana.






Cioppino

A lot of people think making homemade tomato sauce is too much of a bother. It's not, really. You're ahead in the game if you have some fresh herbs growing in pots on the windowsill. If you get really good seafood, the shells add their flavor to the broth. Just pass around plenty of napkins. Robert and Sal used to get in trouble for practicing ventriloquism with the mussel shells at the dinner table.

Broth:


1/4 cup olive oil
about 6 anchovies, chopped
4 cloves garlic, chopped
2 bay leaves
1 stalk of celery, diced
1 onion, chopped
1 roasted red bell pepper, chopped
1 cup Chianti + 2 Tablespoons red wine vinegar
1 quart fish or shrimp stock
6-8 diced fresh tomatoes (use canned if you don't have fresh)
chopped fresh basil
a good pinch of saffron threads



2 Tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
1/2 cup chopped Italian flat-leaf parsley
2-3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
salt to taste
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
2 tablespoons dried oregano, or twice that amount if using fresh
1 teaspoon fennel seeds, crushed with the flat of a knife
1 sprig of rosemary

Seafood: Use whatever is fresh that day, 1/4 pound or more of each variety: prawns (save the shells for making stock), crab, scallops, mussels, firm fish cut in 1-inch pieces (cod, halibut, scrod, bass), fresh clams, fresh oysters (shucked), calamari for the adventurous.

Warm the olive oil and anchovies in a big pot. Add garlic and stir, then add the bay leaves, onion, celery and bell pepper, plus 1/2 of the herbs. Pour in wine, vinegar and Worcestershire and let half the liquid bubble away. Then add tomatoes, basil and the rest of the herbs. Simmer, then add the fish stock and lemon juice, bringing it all to a boil. Finally, toss in the seafood, cover and cook 7-10 minutes. Remove any mussels and clams that haven't opened. Ladle the stew into wide, shallow dishes and sprinkle with parsley. Serve with warm bread.



Lasagne Magro

In the old country, if you can afford meat, you don't hide it in a lasagne. The original recipe is meatless. This delicious lasagne is commonly found in southern Italy.

Ingredients:

At least a quart of good tomato sauce, preferably homemade

1 large carton full-fat ricotta cheese

1 cup grated parmesano reggiano cheese

1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

1 large fresh egg

1/2 onion, chopped

1/4 cup chopped parsley

1/4 cup chopped fresh basil

1/2 pound chopped fresh spinach

8 ounces additional mozzarella cheese, sliced thin




4 ounces additional grated parmesan cheese

1 package dry lasagne noodles

Mix the ricotta and grated cheeses together with egg, onion, spinach and herbs. Cover the bottom of a large lasagne pan with olive oil and then sauce. Add a little water and mix. Make an overlapping layer of the dry noodles across the bottom of the pan. Spread sauce on top, making sure the pasta is covered. Add a layer of the ricotta mixture and mozzarella slices. Continue in this manner until you run out of pasta. Top with sauce, add another layer of mozzarella, then sprinkle on the parmesan. Cover with foil and bake at 375° F for about forty minutes. Check occasionally, and add boiling water around the edges if the pasta seems too dry. Remove the foil and cook another 10 minutes. Let rest an additional 10 minutes. Serve in squares, topped with a basil sprig.





Caffe Frangelico

Frangelico is a liqueur made from hazelnuts grown in the orchards of Lombardy. It's clear and sweet and so delicious, it's said to cause the teeth to sing.

2 parts Frangelico

5 parts hot coffee

Top with whipped cream and crushed hazelnuts.



Penne Pasta With Fresh Arugula, Tomato and Mozzarella

Success depends on fresh tomatoes and arugula and basil. And don't even think about using anything but the freshest mozzarella. You don't need much, so go ahead and splurge on the good stuff.

1/2 pound penne pasta
4 ripe tomatoes, diced
about 10 ounces fresh mozzarella, drained and diced
5 ounces arugula, torn into bite-sized pieces
a few fresh basil leaves
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
salt and red pepper flakes to taste

Cook the pasta. Put the tomatoes, arugula, basil, mozzarella, olive oil, salt and pepper in a large bowl. When the pasta is ready, toss it with the tomato mixture and serve.



Spaghetti alle Vongole

*4 dozen littleneck clams in their shells, the smaller the better.
(If you use quahogs, you only need a dozen; just chop the clam
meat fine.)*

2 Tablespoons of sea salt

1 pound dry spaghetti

1/2 cup olive oil

4-8 garlic cloves, minced

1/2 cup white wine (Principessa Gavia is preferred)

2 Tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley

Scrub the clam shells under cold running water. Cook the spaghetti until al dente. In a heavy pan with a lid, heat the olive oil and sauté the garlic. Add the clams in their shells and the white wine, bring to a boil, cover the pan and cook until the clams open. This should take a few minutes, and feel free to add more wine. Discard clams that do not open; you'll find a few rejects in every bunch. Remove the clams with a slotted spoon. Add the cooked spaghetti to the sauté pan, stirring it into the sauce. Add the parsley. Serve in individual bowls, topped with the clams.



Rosemary Lemonade

In the Old Country version of “Sleeping Beauty,” the princess was awakened from her enchanted slumber with a whiff of rosemary-scented water. The prince was probably miles away, lost.

2 cups water

2 cups sugar

2 cups lemon juice

Grated rind of one lemon

Two sprigs of rosemary

Ice cubes

Cold water or club soda

Combine the water and sugar in a pan and bring the mixture to a strong boil. After three minutes, remove the pan from the heat and stir in lemon juice, lemon rind and rosemary. Cover and steep for an hour. Strain the mixture into a jar. To fix a glass of lemonade, fill a drinking glass about a third full with the lemon syrup, add ice and water or club soda to the top of the glass, and stir. Makes about 4 cups.



Pesce alla San Nicola

Traditionally, individual fish are dressed inside and out with olive oil, garlic, herbs and lemon slices, then wrapped in parchment for roasting, which is a handsome thing to send to the table. But it all works fine with fish steaks or fillets in foil instead of parchment. Halibut, tuna steaks and cod are good choices, or if you live by the sea, try a small, perfectly fresh tinker mackerel (whole) or a small bluefish, sometimes called blue snapper, in season.

Preheat the oven to 400°F, or fire up the gas grill. For each portion, dress the fish with 2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil, sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, 1 teaspoon minced flat-leaf parsley, 1 sprig oregano, 3 pitted black olives, 2 lemon slices, garlic slivers and 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice.

Wrap each portion in foil or parchment. Place each packet on a baking sheet and slide into the oven or place on the grill and cover. Bake for 20 minutes, or until the fish just begins to flake.



Savory Frittata

Always use naturally nested eggs laid by uncaged chickens. The eggs taste better, and the chickens will thank you.

4 medium potatoes, scrubbed and diced fine
6 large, fresh eggs
1/4 cup cream
3/4 cup chopped tomatoes
1 small zucchini, grated
1/4 sweet onion, chopped
1 Tablespoon minced herbs, including oregano, thyme, flat-leaf parsley, red pepper flakes, garlic
2 Tablespoons olive oil + 1 Tablespoon sweet butter
salt and pepper to taste
1 cup shredded cheese

In a wide ovenproof skillet, grill the potatoes in olive oil and butter until browned. Add zucchini and onions, then tomatoes and herbs. Season with salt and pepper. Whisk the eggs together with cream and pour the mixture over potatoes. Sprinkle on the cheese. Bake at 400°F degrees for 25 minutes or until top is firm. Serve in wedges warm, or at room temperature.



Torta Crema (Italian Cream Cake)

1 stick unsalted butter, softened

1/2 cup shortening

2 cups sugar

5 eggs, separated

2 cups flour

1 teaspoon soda

1 cup buttermilk

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 cup flaked coconut

1 cup chopped pecans

Cream the butter and shortening, add the sugar and beat some more. Add egg yolks and beat. Mix flour and baking soda, and add alternately with buttermilk. Stir in vanilla, coconut and pecans. Fold in stiffly beaten egg whites. Pour batter into three well-greased round cake pans or a 13 x 9 x 2-inch baking pan. Bake at 350°F for 40 to 45 minutes, until a stick of dry spaghetti inserted in the middle comes out clean. Cool before frosting.



Cream Cheese Icing

1 package cream cheese, softened

1/2 cup pure unsalted butter, softened

1 box powdered sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla

Chopped pecans and coconut


Beat cream cheese until smooth. Add butter and sugar, then stir in vanilla and beat until smooth. Frost cooled cake in pan or in layers. Top with chopped pecans and coconut. Serve with good strong coffee, or espresso if you have the equipment.



Pasta with Garlic Scapes and Fresh Tomatoes

In Italy, you can find a garden anywhere there is a patch of soil, and in many areas, the growing season is nearly year round. It's common to find an abundant tomato vine twining up the wall near someone's front stoop, or a collection of herbs and greens adorning a window box. Other staples of an Italian kitchen garden include aubergine, summer squash varieties and peppers of all sorts. Perhaps that's why the best dishes are so very simple. Gather the fresh ingredients from your garden or local farmers' market, toss everything together with some hot pasta and serve.

In the early summer and mid-autumn, look for garlic scapes, prized for their mild flavor and slight sweetness. Scapes are the willow green stems and unopened flower buds of hardneck garlic varieties. Roasting garlic scapes with tomatoes and red onion brings out their sweet, rich flavor for a delightful summer meal.



2 swirls of olive oil
10 garlic scapes
1 pint multicolored cherry tomatoes
1 red onion, thinly sliced
Sea salt and red pepper flakes, to taste
½ lb. pasta—fettuccine, tubini or spaghetti are good choices
1 cup baby spinach, arugula or fresh basil leaves, or a combination
1 lemon, zested and juiced
Toasted pine nuts for garnish

Heat oven to 400°F. Toss together olive oil, garlic scapes, tomatoes, onion, salt and pepper flakes and spread in an even layer on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Roast for 12–15 minutes, until tomatoes are just beginning to burst. If you have other garden vegetables, such as peppers, zucchini or aubergine, feel free to add that. Meanwhile, cook pasta according to package directions. Toss everything together with the greens, lemon zest and juice. Garnish with pine nuts. Serve immediately with a nice Barolo wine.