

Ricotta Gnocchi with Salsa della Nonna

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"Michael Chiarello's Bottega Cookbook"

The rich traditional sauce is my grandmother's old recipe. The combination is now a "can't remove" mainstay of the Bottega menu. These light gnocchi have just four ingredients: ricotta, flour, egg yolks, and salt. Use a very good ricotta, such as Bellwether Farms' sheep's milk ricotta. This gnocchi needs a 48-hour lead time because you'll let the ricotta drain overnight the day before you make the gnocchi and then you'll freeze the gnocchi for 24 hours before cooking. Drain the ricotta by lining a colander with cheesecloth and setting it in the sink. My mom used to make a little sling out of the cheesecloth and hang it right from the kitchen faucet.

You want your work surface to be cool. Marble is ideal — a marble pastry slab or countertop is best. If you don't have marble, try laying a few ice packs on the countertop while you make the dough. When you're ready to roll, put the ice back in the freezer and wipe down the work surface so it's dry.

The sauce recipe makes about 4 cups, which is more than you'll need. You can't cut the recipe in half, because the chicken needs a good amount of sauce to simmer in, but having my nonna's sauce in your freezer is never a bad thing.

Makes 72 to 84 gnocchi.

Serves 6 to 8 as a main course.

3 pounds whole milk ricotta, drained overnight

6 egg yolks

2 tsp. sea salt, preferably gray salt

1 cup all-purpose flour, plus extra for sprinkling and dusting

Best quality extra-virgin olive oil for drizzling

Salsa di Pomodoro della Nonna for serving (recipe on page C2)

Grated Pecorino Romano for sprinkling

Using the back of a large spoon, press the ricotta through a fine-mesh sieve into a large bowl. Add the egg yolks and sea salt and mix with a rubber spatula. Gently fold in the 3/4 cup flour; the less you work the dough, the lighter and more tender the gnocchi will be. Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Lightly sprinkle your work surface and two baking sheets with flour. Pull off about a quarter of the gnocchi dough and gently roll it into a rope about 1 inch wide.

Using a dough scraper or a sharp knife dipped in flour, cut individual dumplings from the rope into 1-inch pieces. Gently transfer each piece to a prepared baking sheet and dust with flour so it's lightly coated. Repeat with the remaining gnocchi.

Slide the pans into the freezer and freeze for at least 24 hours or up to 1 month. (Gnocchi have a better texture if they go right from the freezer to the pot.)

Heat a pot of salted water (see note), and, while the water heats, put the sauce on the stove over a simmering flame so it's warm when gnocchi are cooked.

When the water comes to a boil, cook two dozen frozen gnocchi for 3 to 3 1/2 minutes, or for 30 to 45 seconds after they rise to the surface. Using a slotted spoon or a wire skimmer, transfer the gnocchi to a warmed plate. Add another two dozen gnocchi to the pot and, while they cook, finish plating the batch of gnocchi you just took out of the pot.

Spoon about a dozen gnocchi per serving onto a warmed plate. Drizzle with olive oil. Spoon a little of the warm tomato sauce on top and finish with a sprinkling of pecorino.

Wine Pairing: Zinfandel

Note: Salting pasta water — The Italians have a saying: "The pasta water is salted enough when it tastes like the sea." If you can't taste the salt in the water, you haven't used enough. The basic rule is 1 tablespoon of kosher or sea salt for every 1 quart of water. Always reserve a bit of pasta water. If your pasta seems dry, spoon on a little pasta water and toss just before serving.