







MACARONI BY ANY OTHER NAME

Perciatelli has a tubular shape that helps to capture a garlicky tomato sauce. Eggplant is Sicily's bumper crop, abundant in Tunisian (round) and Turkish (elongated) varieties, and islanders love to combine it with pasta any way they can. A trip with her cousins to a locals-only place in Fiumara di Piraino inspired Miraglia Eriequez's take on *maccheroni e melanzane*.



GENERATIONS OF COOKING

At the cooking school of Anna Tasca Lanza, whose family owns some of the lushest vineyards in Sicily, Miraglia Eriquez studied the classics, including, opposite, marinated and grilled oyster mushrooms, escarole sautéed with anchovies, and *involtini* (lightly breaded rolls of veal) grilled with onions. This page: Tomatoes direct from the vine mix it up with arugula and capers.



THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

In Italy, desserts seem to be either simplicity itself or rather involved affairs. Here, strawberries are tossed with sugar and Marsala wine for a light, seasonal dish. And the cannoli, the king of Sicilian pastries—which includes everything from the freshest sheep's-milk ricotta and a delicate fried shell to pistachios and chocolate—combines multiple textures and flavors in a single bite.





GAME PLAN

1 WEEK AHEAD

Make caponata

3 DAYS AHEAD

Make dough for cannoli shells

2 DAYS AHEAD

Roast peppers and cut into strips

Make tomato sauce for macaroni and eggplant

Make cannoli shells

1 DAY AHEAD

Prepare and chill chickpea mixture

Cook and cut octopuses

Assemble macaroni and eggplant

Assemble veal *involtini*

Sauté escarole

Wash and tear greens for salad

4 HOURS AHEAD

Fry *panelle*

CAPONATA

Sweet-and-Sour Eggplant

MAKES ABOUT 1 QUART;

SERVES 10 (AS PART OF ANTIPASTI)

Active time: 1½ hr

Start to finish: 10½ hr (includes chilling)

This recipe makes a lot of caponata, so you'll definitely have leftovers. But it keeps well and is so addictive you'll be happy to have extra on hand.

- 2 lb eggplant (preferably small but not Asian)
- 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon coarse sea salt (preferably Sicilian)
- 2¼ to 2½ cups olive oil
- 11 garlic cloves (from 2 heads), chopped
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste (preferably from a tube)
- 1 (28-oz) can whole Italian tomatoes, finely chopped and juice reserved
- 5 celery ribs, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 large red or yellow bell pepper, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 cup large green Sicilian olives (6 oz), pitted and cut into ¼-inch pieces
- ¼ cup drained bottled capers, rinsed
- ⅓ cup red-wine vinegar
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil

Special equipment: a deep-fat thermometer

► Cut eggplant into ½-inch cubes and transfer to a colander. Toss with 2 tablespoons sea salt. Let drain 1 hour. ► While eggplant drains, heat 2 tablespoons oil in a 4- to 5-quart heavy pot over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking, then sauté three fourths of garlic, stirring, until golden, about 1 minute. Add tomato paste and cook, stirring, 1 minute. Add tomatoes with their juice, then reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until thickened, 20 to 25 minutes.

► Bring 3 cups salted water (see Tips, page 226) to a boil in a 1- to 1½-quart saucepan, then cook celery until tender, 5 to 7 minutes. Drain in a colander and rinse under cold water to stop cooking. ► Gently squeeze eggplant to remove excess moisture and pat dry. Heat ¼ inch oil (about 2 cups) in a 12-inch heavy skillet over moderately high heat until it registers 360°F on thermometer, then fry eggplant in 4 batches, stirring and turning constantly with a slotted spoon, until browned and tender, 3 to 5 minutes per batch. (Return oil to 360°F between batches.) Transfer to paper towels. ► Pour off all but 2 tablespoons oil from skillet, then reduce heat to moderate and cook onion, bell pepper, and remaining garlic, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 10 minutes. Add tomato sauce, eggplant, celery, olives, capers, vinegar, sugar, pepper, and remaining teaspoon sea salt and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, 15 minutes. Cool to room temperature, uncovered, then chill, covered, at least 8 hours.

► Just before serving, stir in parsley and basil. Serve cold or at room temperature.

Cooks' notes:

- If your sea salt is very granular and pebblelike, crush it using the flat side of a large heavy knife or the bottom of a heavy skillet.
- To take the temperature of a shallow amount of oil, put bulb in skillet and turn thermometer facedown, resting other end against rim of skillet. Check temperature frequently.
- Caponata can be chilled up to 1 week.

PANELLE

Chickpea Fritters

SERVES 10 (AS PART OF ANTIPASTI)

Active time: 1 hr

Start to finish: 4 hr (includes chilling)

This is a popular street food in Sicily, especially in Palermo, where warm panelle are served between two pieces of country bread.

3 cups water

2 cups chickpea flour (see Kitchen Notebook, page 214)

1 teaspoon coarse sea salt (preferably Sicilian)

2½ to 2½ cups olive oil

¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

2 tablespoons finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Special equipment: parchment paper; a deep-fat thermometer

► Lightly oil an 8- by 4-inch loaf pan (6-cup capacity) and line with parchment paper, leaving a 2-inch overhang at each end.

► Whisk together water, chickpea flour, sea salt, and 2 tablespoons oil in a 2½- to 3-quart heavy saucepan until smooth, then cook over moderate heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon (to prevent lumps from forming), until very thick and mixture pulls away from side of pan, 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer mixture to loaf pan, smoothing top. Cool, uncovered, then chill, surface of mixture covered with plastic wrap, until firm, at least 3 hours.

► Lift chickpea block out of pan using parchment and transfer to a work surface. Gently flip over block and discard parchment, then pat dry. Cut block crosswise into ¼-inch-thick slices for *panelle*.

► Preheat oven to 300°F.

► Heat ½ inch oil (about 2 cups) in a deep 10-inch heavy skillet until it registers 375°F on thermometer, then fry *panelle* in 5 batches, carefully turning occasionally with tongs, until golden and puffed, 3 to 5 minutes per batch, and transfer to paper towels to drain. Keep warm on a baking sheet in oven while frying remaining batches.

► Arrange *panelle* on a platter and sprinkle with parsley and cheese. Serve immediately.

Cooks' notes:

- If your sea salt is very granular and pebblelike, crush it using the flat side of a large heavy knife or the bottom of a heavy skillet.
- To take the temperature of a shallow amount of oil, put bulb in skillet and turn thermometer facedown, resting other end against rim of skillet. Check temperature frequently.
- Chickpea mixture can be chilled in loaf pan up to 1 day.
- *Panelle* can be fried 4 hours ahead and kept, uncovered, at room temperature. Reheat on a baking sheet in a preheated 350°F oven 10 to 15 minutes.

PEPPERONI ROSSI ARROSTITI

Roasted Red Bell Peppers

SERVES 10 (AS PART OF ANTIPASTI)

Active time: 35 min Start to finish: 1 1/4 hr

5 red bell peppers
2 small garlic cloves, very thinly sliced
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh oregano
3/4 teaspoon coarse sea salt (preferably Sicilian)
1/4 teaspoon black pepper

► Prepare grill for cooking. If using a charcoal grill, open vents on bottom of grill, then light charcoal. Charcoal fire is hot when you can hold your hand 5 inches above rack for 1 to 2 seconds. If using a gas grill, preheat burners on high, covered, 10 minutes, then reduce heat to moderately high.
► Lay bell peppers on their sides on lightly oiled grill rack and roast, turning occasionally with tongs, until skins are blackened, 10 to 12 minutes.
► Transfer to a bowl, then cover and let steam 10 minutes. Peel and seed peppers (reserving juices), then cut into 1/4-inch-thick strips.
► Stir together peppers (with their juices), garlic, oil, vinegar, oregano, sea salt, and pepper and marinate 30 minutes at room temperature.

Cooks' notes:

- If your sea salt is very granular and pebblelike, crush it using the flat side of a large heavy knife or the bottom of a heavy skillet.
- If you're unable to grill outdoors, peppers can be broiled on rack of a broiler pan about 2 inches from heat 10 to 20 minutes.
- Peppers can be roasted and cut into strips (but not marinated) 2 days ahead and chilled, covered.

BABY OCTOPUS SALAD

SERVES 10 (AS PART OF ANTIPASTI)

Active time: 30 min Start to finish: 2 hr

2 1/2 lb cleaned baby octopuses (see cooks' note, below), thawed if frozen
1 Turkish or 1/2 California bay leaf
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon coarse sea salt (preferably Sicilian)
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano

► Rinse octopuses under cold water, then cover with water by 2 inches in a 5- to 6-quart heavy pot. Bring to a boil with bay leaf, then reduce heat and simmer, covered, until octopuses are tender (tentacles can easily be pierced with a fork), about 45 minutes.

► Transfer octopuses to a colander with tongs, then discard cooking liquid and bay leaf. When cool enough to handle, cut off and discard heads and halve octopuses lengthwise. Cool to room temperature.
► Whisk together oil, lemon juice, sea salt, pepper, and oregano. Toss octopuses with dressing and marinate, stirring occasionally, 20 minutes at room temperature.

Cooks' notes:

- If you can't find baby octopuses, you can substitute a 2 1/2-lb regular octopus, though the texture will not be as delicate. Discard head of regular octopus, then cut body and tentacles into 2-inch pieces; follow baby-octopus cooking procedure (above), but simmer about 1 1/2 hours rather than 45 minutes.
- If your sea salt is very granular and pebblelike, crush it using the flat side of a large heavy knife or the bottom of a heavy skillet.
- Octopuses can be cooked and cut (but not tossed with dressing) 1 day ahead and chilled, covered. Bring to room temperature before proceeding.

MACCHERONI E MELANZANE

Macaroni and Eggplant

SERVES 10 (FIRST COURSE)

Active time: 1 1/2 hr Start to finish: 2 1/2 hr

This is a pasta dish that is served in Sicilian homes and home-style restaurants, rather than upscale places. The recipe calls for perciatelli or bucatini, which is what Italians consider maccheroni.

2 (1 1/2-lb) large eggplants (not Asian), trimmed
2 tablespoons plus 1/2 teaspoon coarse sea salt (preferably Sicilian)
2 1/4 to 2 1/2 cups olive oil
1 medium onion, finely chopped
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 (28-oz) can whole Italian tomatoes, finely chopped and juice reserved
1/4 cup chopped fresh basil
3/4 lb *perciatelli* or *bucatini* (long tubular pasta; see Kitchen Notebook, page 214)

Special equipment: a deep-fat thermometer

Accompaniment: *finely grated Pecorino Romano or Parmigiano-Reggiano*

► Cut eggplants lengthwise into 20 (1/4-inch-thick) slices total with a long serrated knife and transfer to a colander. Toss with 2 tablespoons sea salt, then let drain 1 hour.

► While eggplant drains, heat 2 tablespoons oil in a 4- to 5-quart heavy pot over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking, then sauté onion and garlic, stirring, until golden, about 6 minutes. Add tomatoes with their juice and remaining 1/2 teaspoon sea salt, then reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until thickened, 20 to 25 minutes. Stir in basil.

► Gently squeeze eggplant to remove excess moisture (this helps reduce any bitter flavor) and pat dry. Heat 1/4 inch oil (about 2 cups) in a 12-inch heavy skillet over moderately high heat until it registers 360°F on thermometer, then fry eggplant in 4 batches, turning over once with tongs, until golden, about 4 minutes per batch. Transfer with tongs to paper towels to drain.

► Cook pasta in a large pot of boiling salted water (see Tips, page 226) until al dente, then drain in colander and rinse under cold water to stop cooking. Drain well and toss pasta with 1 tablespoon oil.

► Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 350°F. Spread 1/2 cup tomato sauce in bottom of a 13- by 9-inch glass or ceramic baking dish.

► Line up 5 pasta strands parallel to one another on a work surface and cut crosswise into thirds. Put 1 fried eggplant slice on work surface and stack cut pasta (15 pieces) across 1 end of slice. Roll up eggplant, leaving ends of pasta exposed, and transfer to baking dish, seam side down. Make more rolls in same manner with remaining eggplant and pasta, transferring to dish (rolls will fit snugly). Spoon remaining sauce over eggplant, then cover dish loosely with foil. Bake until rolls are heated through, about 15 minutes.

Cooks' notes:

- Tomato sauce, without basil, can be made 2 days ahead and cooled, uncovered, then chilled, covered. Stir in basil before proceeding.
- To take the temperature of a shallow amount of oil, put bulb in skillet and turn thermometer facedown, resting other end against rim of skillet. Check temperature frequently.
- Dish can be assembled (but not baked) 1 day ahead and chilled, covered (basil may discolor). Bring to room temperature to bake.

VEAL INVOLTINI

SERVES 10 (MAIN COURSE)

Active time: 2 hr Start to finish: 2 1/4 hr

With so many courses in a single dinner, you don't need huge portions of meat for the main course. Top-quality veal really makes a difference in this dish; meat should be cut from the leg for scaloppine.

4 cups fine fresh bread crumbs (from 10 slices firm white sandwich bread)
2 lb veal cutlets (no more than 1/4 inch thick)
1/2 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
5 garlic cloves, minced
4 1/2 oz finely grated Pecorino Romano or Parmigiano-Reggiano (1 1/4 cups; see *Tips*, page 226)
1 1/4 cups olive oil
1 teaspoon black pepper
1 large white onion, cut into 8 wedges and layers separated

Special equipment: 7 (10- to 12-inch) metal skewers

► Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 350°F.
► Spread bread crumbs in a shallow baking pan and toast, stirring once or twice, until golden, 8 to 10 minutes.
► Gently pound veal cutlets to slightly less than 1/8 inch thick between 2 sheets of plastic wrap with flat side of a meat pounder or with a rolling pin, then cut into roughly 4- by 3-inch pieces.
► Stir together parsley, garlic, 3/4 cup cheese, 1/4 cup oil, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper until a paste forms.
► Stir together bread crumbs, remaining

1/2 cup cheese, and remaining

1/2 teaspoon pepper.

► Season cutlets lightly with salt and pepper and spread 1 side of each piece with 1 teaspoon parsley-garlic paste.
► Line a baking sheet with wax paper. Roll up veal pieces (paste sides up), starting from a short side. Put remaining cup oil in a bowl and dip each roll in it, letting excess drip off, then dredge in bread-crumb mixture, pressing gently to help crumbs adhere. Transfer to baking sheet. ► Thread 1 veal roll onto a skewer, then 1 piece of onion, leaving about 1/4 inch between. Repeat on same skewer 2 more times, then transfer skewer to baking sheet. Assemble 6 more skewers in same manner (last skewer will have only 2 rolls).

► Prepare grill for cooking. If using a charcoal grill, open vents on bottom of grill, then light charcoal. Charcoal fire is hot when you can hold your hand 5 inches above rack for 1 to 2 seconds. If using a gas grill, preheat burners on high, covered, 10 minutes, then reduce heat to moderately high.

► Grill veal on a lightly oiled grill rack, covered only if using gas grill, turning over once, until rolls are golden, about 6 minutes total.

► Remove veal and onion from skewers and serve immediately.

Cooks' notes:

- Veal and onion can be threaded onto skewers 1 day ahead and chilled, loosely covered.
- If you're unable to grill outdoors, you can broil veal and onion skewers. Preheat broiler and lightly oil rack of a broiler pan. Broil skewers in 2 batches 4 to 6 inches from heat, turning over once, until golden, about 6 minutes per batch.

SICILIAN SALAD

SERVES 10

Active time: 30 min Start to finish: 30 min

This Sicilian-style salad is more heavily dressed than other green salads, so that there's extra oil and vinegar to soak up with bread.

3 bunches arugula (3/4 lb), coarse stems discarded and leaves torn into pieces
1/2 lb Bibb lettuce (2 small heads), leaves torn if large
1 celery heart (1/2 lb), thinly sliced on a sharp diagonal
1 small red onion, halved lengthwise and very thinly sliced crosswise
1/2 lb cherry tomatoes, halved
1/2 lb brine-cured black olives (1 cup), drained
2 tablespoons drained bottled capers, rinsed
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon coarse sea salt (preferably Sicilian)
2 tablespoons red-wine vinegar

► Combine arugula, lettuce, celery, onion, tomatoes, olives, and capers in a large bowl. Drizzle with oil and sprinkle with sea salt, then toss. Drizzle with vinegar and toss again.

Cooks' notes:

- If your sea salt is very granular and pebblelike, crush it using the flat side of a large heavy knife or the bottom of a heavy skillet.
- Greens can be washed and torn 1 day ahead and chilled in sealed plastic bags lined with dampened paper towels.

For MORE RECIPES, see page 215.

WINE ADVICE

Anyone familiar with Sicily knows that to eat or drink there is to taste its history. For the ancient Greeks, who brought vines with them when they settled on the island in the eighth century B.C., it became a land of abundance and the good life. Over the centuries, grape varieties have continued to arrive—most recently, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc. But for this Sicilian feast, I am suggesting mainly wines made from grapes that have long been assimilated into Sicily's culture. I chose the bright, young *Insolia* '04 of *Cusumano* (\$11) to accompany the antipasti, followed by another white, *Genofranco*'s *Grillo* '03 (\$11), soft and full but quite dry, with the pasta and eggplant rolls. Some might prefer the familiar hint of tropical fruit that Chardonnay gives to the blend of Italian varieties in *Planeta*'s *La Segreta Bianco* '03 (\$18) or the restraint of *Tasca d'Almerita*'s *Regaleali Bianco* (\$14), Sicily's most aristocratic white wine, made from a medley of local grapes supported by a little Sauvignon Blanc.

Nero d'Avola is Sicily's leading red-wine grape. My favorite *Nero d'Avolas* are those produced on the *La Lumia* family estate, and I would pick its fulsomely smooth *Signorio* '98 (\$27) over its sprightlier, fruity *Cadetto* '03 (\$17) for the veal *involtini*. The *Don Antonio* '02 (\$35) from *Morgante* has a touch of oak on the palate, and the very name of *Donnafugata*'s *Mille e Una Notte* '01 (\$64) hints at that wine's melodramatic style.

The dessert wine *Passito di Pantelleria* is made on a rocky island midway between Sicily and Tunisia. The same variety of Muscat, dried on straw mats to concentrate its sweetness, has been used to make virtually this same wine for almost as long as Sicily has grown grapes. The two I like with the desserts here are the *Pellegrino* '03 (\$22) and the *Colosi* '01 (\$32). But I'd also recommend *Hauner*'s *Malvasia delle Lipari* '02 (\$25), a rarer *passito* from the Aeolian Islands, north of Sicily, for its hauntingly delicate aroma and flavor. —Gerald Asher