

TORTINO DI PATATE

POTATO AND PARMESAN GRATIN

Oriana Neri, Bologna

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 35 MIN START TO FINISH: 2 1/2 HR

This dish—which may be the ideal marriage of potatoes and cheese—shows that luxury ingredients like Parmigiano-Reggiano are often at their best when presented in the most straightforward way.

4 lb medium boiling potatoes
1 1/2 teaspoons fine sea salt
1 cup heavy cream
1 cup whole milk
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
7 oz finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano (3 1/2 cups; see Tips, page 238)

- Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 350°F.
- Peel potatoes and cut into 1/8-inch-thick slices with a knife or an adjustable-blade slicer, spreading slices out on a large kitchen towel. Sprinkle with sea salt (1 1/2 teaspoons).
- Stir together cream and milk.
- Dot bottom of a 3-quart shallow baking dish (13 by 9 inches) with half of butter and pour in 1/3 cup cream mixture. Without rinsing or drying potatoes, divide into 5 piles. Layer potatoes in baking dish, 1 pile per layer, spreading 1/3 cup cream mixture and one fourth of cheese between layers. Drizzle remaining cream mixture over potatoes and dot with remaining butter.
- Bake, uncovered, until potatoes are very tender and top is browned, about 2 hours. Let stand at room temperature 10 minutes before serving.

CAPONATA

Anna Maria Musco Dominici, Palermo

MAKES 3 TO 4 CUPS (ANTIPASTO OR SIDE DISH)

ACTIVE TIME: 45 MIN

START TO FINISH: 9 HR (INCLUDES TIME FOR FLAVORS TO DEVELOP)

The levels of sweet and sour in caponata vary from household to household. In this version, the onions and celery are caramelized for incredible depth of flavor—which improves over time.

2 lb small Italian eggplants (about 4)
1 tablespoon kosher salt or 2 teaspoons fine sea salt
1 1/2 cups extra-virgin olive oil
1 cup chopped onion (1 medium)
4 medium celery ribs, cut crosswise into very thin slices (1 1/2 cups)
1/3 cup large green Sicilian olives (1 3/4 oz), pitted (see Kitchen Notebook, page 227) and coarsely chopped
1 3/4 oz Italian capers packed in salt (1/3 cup), rinsed well and drained
2 tablespoons sugar, or to taste
1/3 cup white-wine vinegar
1 (14- to 15-oz) can whole tomatoes in juice, drained and chopped (1 cup)

- Peel eggplants, leaving some strips of peel, then cut into 1-inch cubes and spread on half of a kitchen towel. Sprinkle eggplant with salt, then cover with other half of towel and

weight with a baking sheet topped with 2 or 3 large cans for 30 minutes. ► Meanwhile, heat 1/2 cup oil in a 10-inch heavy skillet over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking, then cook onion, stirring, until pale golden, 6 to 8 minutes. Add celery and cook, stirring, until onion and celery are deep golden brown, about 10 minutes. Add olives, capers, and 2 tablespoons sugar and cook, stirring, 2 minutes, then stir in vinegar and tomatoes.

► Reduce heat and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, 20 minutes. If sauce is very acidic, add 1 to 2 teaspoons sugar (to taste). Transfer to a bowl and keep warm, covered.

► Rinse eggplant in a colander under running water, then squeeze dry in small handfuls.

► Heat remaining cup oil in cleaned skillet over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking, then fry eggplant in 2 batches, turning occasionally with tongs, until tender and browned on all sides, 8 to 10 minutes per batch. Transfer as cooked to paper towels to drain, then transfer to a large shallow serving dish in an even layer. Spoon sauce on top, spreading evenly, and let stand, covered with a kitchen towel, at room temperature, at least 8 hours (for flavors to develop). Stir before serving.

COOK'S NOTE: Caponata keeps, covered and chilled, 1 week. Bring to room temperature before serving.

TORTA SALATA

CHEESE-AND-MORTADELLA-STUDDDED BREAD

Ronnie Venturioli, Bologna

SERVES 12 TO 16

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 4 1/2 HR (INCLUDES CHILLING)

Great on its own or as part of a meal, this tender bread is wonderfully rich, particularly when served warm.

7 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into pieces and softened slightly, plus additional for greasing pans
1 cup warm water (105–115°F)
1 (1/4-oz) package active dry yeast (2 1/4 teaspoons)
1/2 teaspoon sugar
4 cups all-purpose flour
2 oz finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano (1 cup; see Tips, page 238)
1 teaspoon salt
3 large eggs
3 1/2 oz Emmental cheese, cut into 1/4-inch dice (3/5 cup)
3 1/2 oz Italian Fontina, cut into 1/4-inch dice (3/5 cup)
3 1/2 oz sliced imported mortadella (preferably from Bologna), cut into 1/4-inch pieces (3/4 cup)
3 1/2 oz sliced prosciutto *cotto* (see Shopping List, page 232) or baked ham, cut into 1/4-inch pieces (3/4 cup)

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: 2 (8-inch) round cake pans (about 2 inches deep) or 1 (12-inch) round cake pan

- Butter cake pans, then line bottoms with a round of parchment or wax paper, and butter paper.
- Stir together water, yeast, and sugar in a small bowl and let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes. (If mixture doesn't foam, start over with new yeast.)
- Blend flour, parmesan, softened butter, salt, eggs, and yeast mixture in a food processor until combined well.
- Transfer mixture to a large bowl and stir in remaining ingredients with a wooden spoon until evenly distributed.

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