
Sunday Dinner

in Italy

Bella Michaels

Lessons From Nonna...

When you run a restaurant that does 700–800 covers in a night and you want to make sure everyone gets the same great experience from start to finish, your food has to be very well thought out and easy to execute, but still pack the right balance of flavor. My food is straightforward because that’s how I learned to cook, both as a kid and throughout my culinary training and restaurant cooking. It’s important to me to be able to take simple ingredients and make a dish that stands out and is memorable. The recipes in this book are geared to help people cook delicious food on an everyday basis. And the food in this book? Is food I wanna eat.

I started cooking when I was five or six years old, growing up in New Jersey, making meatballs with my Italian grandmother. I was a wild kid and she gave me things to do that kept me busy and out of trouble. When we went out to eat, I was always the kid trying the “weird” things on the menu. While my sister usually stuck to pasta with butter and cheese, I always wanted to order something new or different and then try to figure out how they made it.

In this book, you’ll find recipes inspired by the cooking I did with my grandmother all the way up to the food I cook today at my restaurant and at home. These recipes are in the tradition of my family and every chef I’ve learned from, but at the end of the day, it’s my flavors, my food. This food is who I am.

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Sunday dinner in Italian families is all about macaroni—the word we use for almost any kind of pasta. I’ve always been a big fan of pasta, but over the course of my career, I’ve found that I really enjoy making fresh pasta and experimenting with different flavor profiles in my pasta dough.

In my Italian-inspired restaurant, I always have 4 or 5 different pastas on the menu that showcase what’s fresh and available during the season. This chapter showcases lots of fun flavors of pasta you can make at home, and the accompanying sauces and extras that go with it.

You’ll see that I don’t include salt in the recipe for any of my pasta dough. I think it’s more important to salt the pasta water correctly—one tablespoon kosher salt per every quart of water. Your pasta water should taste like the ocean—that’s how you get the best flavor out of your pasta.

If you have a stand mixer, you’ll need the pasta rollers and cutter attachments to make some of these pastas. Or, you can buy a standalone pasta machine, if you wish. If not, you can always use well-made artisanal fresh pasta from your farmers’ market or grocery store in many of these recipes.

If you’re willing to learn, making fresh pasta is really pretty easy and takes almost no time at all. You probably already have all the ingredients you need: flour, eggs, water, and oil. In terms of tools, you need your hands or a food processor. From there, the possibilities are endless.

As a reminder...

US Dry Volume Measurements

Measure	Equivalent
1/16 teaspoon	dash
1/8 teaspoon	a pinch
3 teaspoons	1 tablespoon
1/8 cup	2 tablespoons
1/4 cup	4 tablespoons
1/3 cup	5 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon
1/2 cup	8 tablespoons
3/4 cup	12 tablespoons
1 cup	16 tablespoons
1 pound	16 ounces

US Liquid Volume Measurements

Measure	Equivalent
8 fluid ounces	1 cup
1 pint	2 cups
1 quart	2 pints
1 gallon	4 quarts

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Squid Ink Capellini

With Clams, Pancetta, and Red Chili

Ingredients:

10 ounces Squid Ink Pasta Dough
(recipe follows)
1 cup chicken broth
1 cup white wine
2 pounds littleneck clams, rinsed
under cold, running water
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
½ cup small-diced pancetta
2 tablespoons minced shallot
1 tablespoon minced garlic
¼ teaspoon red chili flakes
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley
1 tablespoon finely chopped basil

You'll need squid ink for this pasta, which you can find at a local Asian supermarket or from a fishmonger. In Italy, this dish is called capellini al nero de seppia. I just call it good. The squid ink pasta has an inherent seafood taste to it, and the heat of the chili flakes brings it all together with the clams. The parsley and basil make it fresh and bright

Serves 4 as a small plate

Active Time = 55-60 minutes

Instructions:

1. Cut the squid ink pasta dough into 1-inch cubes. Using a pasta extruder fitted with the capellini attachment, place the pieces one at a time into the powered extruder. Capellini will begin to form and cut at around 8

inches long. Toss with a little flour to prevent sticking and clumping, and place capellini on a parchment-lined baking sheet and refrigerate. (If you do not have a pasta extruder you can use a pasta machine to create pasta sheets, then cut them with a capellini cutter.)

2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. A good rule of thumb is to use 1 tablespoon of kosher salt per quart of water in your pot.
3. In a separate large saucepan or stockpot, bring the chicken broth and wine to a boil over medium-high heat. Add the clams, cover with a lid, and simmer for 4½- 5 minutes, or until all the clams have opened. Remove the clams with a slotted spoon and continue to boil the liquid until it reduces by half. Remove clams from their shells and discard the shells. Discard any clams that didn't open.
4. In a large sauté pan over high heat, sauté the pancetta in olive oil for 3 minutes or until just crispy. Add shallot, garlic, and chili flakes and sauté for 3 minutes.
5. Once the pot of water comes to a boil, take the capellini out of the refrigerator. Gently drop the capellini into the boiling water and cook for 1-1½ minutes, until al dente.
6. Reserve ¼ cup of the cooking water before draining the capellini. Drain the capellini.
7. Add the reserved pasta water and capellini to the sauté pan. Add the clams, reduced clam broth, and butter. Toss to coat the capellini, and when the butter is melted, toss in the lemon juice, parsley, and basil.
8. Transfer the pasta to a large serving bowl or individual bowls for serving.

Squid Ink Pasta Dough

Ingredients:

1½ cups “00” flour (or all-purpose flour), plus more for dusting
 3 large egg yolks
 2½ tablespoons water
 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
 1 tablespoon squid ink

Makes approximately 10 ounces of dough.

Active Time = 5 minutes

Inactive Time = 1 hour

Instructions:

1. Add the “00” flour to a food processor fitted with a plastic dough blade.
2. In a separate bowl, whisk the egg yolks, water, olive oil, and squid ink. Turn on the food processor and slowly add the liquid. After a minute, tiny dough balls will form. Stop and scrape down the inside of the food processor bowl to fully incorporate all the ingredients. If the dough is too wet and not coming together, add a little flour. If the dough is too dry and not coming together, add a little water. It should form into one ball.
3. Remove the dough ball and dust with flour. Knead for 1 minute, wrap tightly in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 2 days. Remove from refrigerator 10 minutes before using.

Corn Agnolotti

With Pine Nuts and Porcinis

This dish was on the menu for the first four months my restaurant was open. It was by far the most popular pasta dish all summer, and people were really sad when corn went out of season and we had to take it off the menu. This is one of my most favorite dishes we’ve ever done.

Serves 4 as a small plate

Active Time = 1 hour 30 minutes

Instructions:

1. Using a sharp chef’s knife, slice the corn kernels off the cobs, and use the back of your knife to extract extra corn juice. You should have 4 cups of kernels with juice.

Ingredients:

10 ears of fresh sweet corn
 ½ cup mascarpone
 ¾ teaspoon kosher salt
 2 teaspoons cornstarch (optional; see Step 4 below)
 10 ounces Pasta Dough
 Semolina flour for dusting
 All-purpose flour for dusting
 1 tablespoon canola oil
 3 cups cleaned porcini mushrooms
 3 tablespoons pine nuts
 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, cubed
 4 tablespoons grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
 1 tablespoon chopped chives

2. In a food processor, blend the corn kernels and juice for 1½ minutes for a smooth purée.
3. Place a fine-mesh strainer over a mixing bowl and pour the corn purée through the strainer, pressing on the solids with the back of a spoon to push through as much liquid as possible. This should yield 1½ cups corn juice. Discard the solids in the strainer.
4. In a small saucepan, bring the corn juice to a simmer over medium-high heat, whisking as the juice begins to simmer. Lower the heat to medium and continue to whisk for 2 minutes longer to allow the corn juice to thicken. Remove from heat and whisk in the mascarpone and ¼ teaspoon salt to create a pudding-like texture. If it's too thin, whisk in a paste of 1 tablespoon water + 2 teaspoons cornstarch while liquid is simmering.
5. Transfer to a bowl, cover, and refrigerate for 30 minutes or up to 2 days. When chilled, put the corn filling into a pastry bag or Ziploc bag with ½ inch snipped off the corner just before piping.
6. Divide the pasta dough into 2 equal pieces. Flatten with the heel of your hand, then roll the first piece of pasta dough through pasta machine on the widest setting twice. Fold it lengthwise, and roll it through 1 more time.
7. Adjust rollers to next setting and roll pasta sheet through one time. Adjust rollers to next setting and put pasta sheet through again. Continue this until you have reached the fifth-widest setting of your pasta rollers. You may need to cut the pasta sheet in half depending on the size of your work surface. Lay the rolled pasta sheet on a flat, lightly floured surface.

8. Repeat with second piece of pasta dough.
9. Dust a baking sheet (that will fit into your refrigerator) with semolina flour. Set aside.
10. With the pasta on a lightly floured flat surface, pipe the corn filling in a straight line on the pasta sheet, about ½ inch up from the bottom edge. Fold the bottom up and press it into top of the pasta sheet, leaving ½ inch of space for the filling to move into. Press all the way down the long line of the pasta to seal it closed into a sort of tube.
11. Starting at one end, use your thumb and forefinger to pinch this long tube of pasta in one-inch increments to create little “pillows.” Doing this will compress the filling more tightly and create a pinched, sealed space (about ¾”) between each pillow for you to separate them into individual agnolotti in the next step.
12. Run a serrated pasta cutter or crimped pastry wheel along the top edge of the folded-over dough to trim off the excess. Don't cut it too close to the filling, or you'll risk it leaking out or breaking apart in the boiling water.
13. Then, rolling it away from you, use the pasta cutter or pastry wheel to cut through the center of the pinched area between each pillow, creating the agnolotti. You can press down again around each edge to make sure they are sealed. Place individual agnolotti on the semolina-dusted tray in a single layer. You should have 45-50 pieces. Refrigerate for 20 minutes.
14. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. A good rule of thumb is to use 1 tablespoon of kosher salt per quart of water in your pot.

15. Meanwhile, in a dry sauté pan, toast the pine nuts over medium heat for 5 minutes, shaking the pan often to prevent burning.

16. Heat the canola oil in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Sauté the porcinis for 5–7 minutes, or until soft and tender, and season with remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt. Keep warm.

17. When the pot of water is at a full boil, drop in half the agnolotti and cook for 2 minutes. Meanwhile, stir butter into the warm porcinis.

18. Remove the cooked agnolotti with a slotted spoon or wok skimmer and gently toss with the porcinis, as the butter continues to melt.

19. Cook the remaining agnolotti and add them to the sauté pan. Then add 2 tablespoons of the Parmigiano-Reggiano and gently toss to coat.

20. Transfer the agnolotti to a large serving dish or individual serving bowls. Garnish with toasted pine nuts, chives, and remaining Parmigiano-Reggiano.

Red Wine Fusilli

With Octopus Ragu

Serving fusilli pasta cooked in red wine is not only visually appealing, it tastes like nothing else. This pasta almost doesn't need any sauce, but I can't resist serving it with octopus. The octopus breaks down into the ragu and releases its own liquid into the sauce.

Serves 4 as a small plate

Active Time = 1 hour 15 minutes

Instructions:

1. Grind frozen octopus using a coarse meat grinder. Set aside to thaw. If you do not have a grinder, don't freeze the octopus and instead chop it into a $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch dice. This will take more time than noted above.

Ingredients:

1 $\frac{1}{4}$ pounds octopus tentacles, cut into 1-inch cubes and frozen
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 1 teaspoon extra virgin olive oil
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup small-diced onion
 1 tablespoon minced garlic
 1 bay leaf
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup canned crushed tomatoes
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon dried oregano
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon red chili flakes
 6 ounces dried fusilli pasta
 1 750ml bottle red wine (Merlot recommended)
 1 tablespoon sugar
 1 tablespoon finely chopped chives

2. Heat the olive oil in a large heavy-bottomed pot over high heat and sauté the octopus for 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. The meat will release a little moisture into the pan.

3. Stir in the onions, garlic, and bay leaf and sauté 3 minutes longer, or until the onions are soft and translucent. Add the crushed tomatoes, oregano, and chili flakes. Bring the mixture to a low boil and reduce the heat to low. Simmer uncovered for 45 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes. The liquid will reduce and the octopus will become tender.

4. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil for the pasta. A good rule of thumb is to use 1 tablespoon of kosher salt per quart of water in your pot.

5. Boil the fusilli pasta for just 1½ minutes—it will not be fully cooked. Drain and set aside.

6. Return the empty pasta pot to the stove and add the red wine and sugar. Bring to a boil over high heat. Lower the heat to medium and simmer for 10–12 minutes, or until wine reduces by half. At this point the octopus ragu should be finished and can be kept warm on the stove until pasta is ready.

7. Return the reduced wine to a boil and add the pasta to finish cooking it. Gently stir the pasta to prevent sticking and boil for 1½ minutes, until the pasta is al dente. Drain and toss the pasta with remaining olive oil to prevent sticking, then transfer to a large bowl or individual bowls and top with the octopus ragu. Garnish with chives and serve.

Strozzapreti

With Smoked Mozzarella and Eggplant

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons canola oil
 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
 ¾ pounds eggplant, peeled and cubed
 ½ teaspoon kosher salt
 ½ pound dried strozzapreti (or any dried rolled pasta, like cavatelli)
 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
 1 cup small-diced smoked mozzarella (approximately ¼ pound)
 1 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
 1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley

The word “strozzapreti” literally means “priest choker,” but I promise this dish won’t make you have to go to confession. The smoked mozzarella and eggplant are the standouts in this dish.

Serves 4 as a small plate

Active Time = 40–45 minutes

Instructions:

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil for the pasta. A good rule of thumb is to use 1 tablespoon of kosher salt per quart of water in your pot.

2. In a large sauté pan, heat the oils over medium-high heat. Add the

eggplant, toss to coat with oil, and season with salt. Let the eggplant cook for 1 minute before stirring. Then, sauté for 10–15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until tender.

3. Add the strozzapreti to the boiling water for 10–11 minutes, or until al dente. Reserve $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the cooking water, then drain the pasta.

4. Toss the pasta into the cooked eggplant over medium heat. Add the reserved pasta water and butter. When the butter has melted, stir in the smoked mozzarella, Parmigiano-Reggiano, and parsley. Toss for 1–2 minutes, or until cheese has melted.

5. Transfer the pasta to large bowl for family-style serving or individual serving bowls.