Columbus' voyages laid a path for a worldwide food exchange

BY DAN JACONI SPECLUL WHERE

Because he was born in Genoa, we often eat Italian foods on Columbus Day, which is Monday, to honer the man who officially, if not technically, discovered America (he got as far as the West Indies). But the dietary influence of Christopher Columbus is bigger than that.

Columbus was responsible for the beginning of the Columbian Exchange, a massive crossing over between the Old World and he New, of plants, animals and more. That exchange, which followed Columbus's two voyages across the Atlantic, truly changed the world.

Traveling from west to east, checolate, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, squashes, many kinds of beans, turkey, avocados and other tropical fruits first became known in the Old World after Columbus's travels. Equally important was the movement from east to west, introducing to the New World wheat, citrus fruits, grapes, sugar, cabbage, lettuce, beef cattle, pigs and



Go Italian: This lasagna is layered with ricotta, mozzarella and, ideally, authentic

Parmigiano-Reggiano cheeses, plus spinach.

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Exchange that the dish was bathed in tomato sauce.

Making lasagna used to be as daunting as voyaging into unknown territory. For years, I avoided making lasagna al forno, with its homemade tomato and backanal sauces most, cheeses,

Then, versions slanted toward New World sensibilities

New World sensibilities emerged.

An instant, no-boil version of pasta is a major convenience. These corrugated sheets produce a fine lasagna when paired with the right combination of other ingredients. In this version,

ricotta cheese
1 cup (4 ounces) shredded
reduced-fat mozzarella cheese
12 sheets oven-ready lasagna 1/4 cup grated Parmesan

In a small Dutch oven or large. heavy saucepan, heat 1 tablespoon oil over medium-high heat. Sauté sliced onion and half the garlic until onion is translucent, 4 minutes. Add peppers, tomato sauce

tomato sauce enriched with roasted red peppers makes a robust, red sauce. It is layered with ricotta, mozzarella and, ide-ally, authentic Parmigiano-Reg-giano cheeses, plus spinach. The result is memorably intense yet light. It freezes beautifully, so

LASAGNA WITH SPINACH AND RED PEPPER SAUCE 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided

2 Spanish onions, one thinly sliced, one chopped 4 garlic cloves, chopped and divided 1 jar (12 oz.) roasted red pep-pers, drained and chopped 1 jar (25 oz.) or 1 can (28 oz.)

basii
3 packages (10 ounces each)
frozen chopped spinach, defrosted and squeezed dry
1 container (15 ounces) low-fat

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In large, non-stick skillet, heat remaining oil over medium-high heat. Sauté onion and remaining heat. Sauté onion and remaining garlic until onion is translucent. Add spinach and 1/2 cup water. Cook 10 minutes, stirring occa-sionally. Meanwhile, combine ricotta and mozzarello cheeses in a bowl.

Spoon 1/4 sauce to cover bottom of 9x13x2 inch baking dish.
Arrange 3 sheets pasta over sauce.
Cover with 1/3 spinach. Spread over 1/3 cheese mixture. Sprinkle on 1 tablespoon Parmesan. Repeat process twice more. Top with remaining pasta, sauce and Parmesan.

Cover with foil and bake 45 minutes. Remove from oven and let sit, uncovered, 15 minutes before serving.

Makes 9 servings.

Nutritional information per serving: 350 calories, 13 g. fat (5 g. saturated fat), 42 g. carbohy-drate, 18 g. protein, 6 g. dietary fiber, 540 mg. sodium.

Dana Jacobi writes for the American Institute for Cancer Research book and is the author of The Joy of Soy.

Enjoy this quick, easy vegetarian minestrone

See related column by Beverly Price. Recipe courtesy of Annabel Cohen at www.annabelcooks.com

SHORTCUT VEGETARIAN

MINESTRONE
Minestra is one word for soup in Italian and minestrone means

There are probably as many minestrone soup recipes as there are Italians. This one is easy, fast and vegetarian, and feeds a crowd. For variation, you could add some green cabbage-or diced potatoes.

- 1/4 cup olive oil (not extra virgin) 2 cups chopped onions

- teaspoon minced garlic
 cups vegetable broth,
 stock or water
 15-ounce can white beans
 {such as cannellni}
- 1 15-ounce can garbanzo beans or chick peas, drained
- 2 cups diced carrots
- 2 cups diced cerrots

 1 28-ounce can (approximately) diced tomatoes with juice

 1 10-ounce package frozen spinach, not defrosted

 1 teaspoon frosh rosemary leaves or dried
- 1 teaspoon fresh or dried oregano
- 2 tablespoons dried parsley

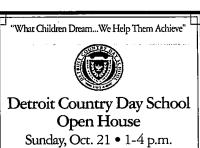
Freshly ground pepper to taste Salt to taste

4 cups cooked small pasta, such as shells
Freshly grated Parmesan cheese to taste

Heat oil in a large soup pot over medium-high heat. Add onions and garlic and sauté until soft* ened, about 5 minutes. Add remaining ingredients except pasta and cheese. Bring to a bo Reduce heat to a slow boil and cook, uncovered, for 1 hour. Remove from heat and ladle out about one-third of the soup. Let the third of soup cool to warm and puree in a blender or bowl of a

food processor until smooth. Return the pureed soup to the pot of soup and stir until completely incorporated.

Heat the soup until very hot and adjust sensonings to taste. About 5 minutes before serving, add pasts so that it doesn't become mushy. Add Parmesan cheese and more fresh ground pepper, if you'd like. Makes 16-20



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