

Light Italian dishes ready in less than an hour

Many Americans identify spaghetti and meatballs, veal parmesan and pizza as favorite Italian foods, but these dishes are not as quintessentially Italian as we have come to believe.

Even the carefully tended sauces that simmer for hours in the kitchens of Italian-American households are considerably different from the lighter tomato sauces used in traditional Italian cooking.

In her new book "Italian Fast & Fresh" (Harper & Row, \$15.95), Julie Dannenbaum provides a sampling of these two related, yet distinctly separate, culinary traditions.

Having spent the past nine summers as a cooking instructor at the Gritti Palace Hotel in Venice, Dannenbaum has had extensive contact with Italian chefs, and this association has given her a first-hand knowledge of regional Italian cooking.

DANNENBAUM DISCUSSES the similarities and differences between the styles of cooking she observed at Gritti and the Italian-American cooking that she was exposed to during her childhood in Philadelphia.

She also discusses their connections to a common culture and a common way of cooking, and she shows that Americanized Italian food has evolved after years of gradual adjustments and "tinkering" with recipes.

It is evident that Dannenbaum has a love for both types of Italian food. Dannenbaum reminisces about learning from Italian chefs as warmly as she recounts fond memories of the pungent smells that emanated from the home of Mrs. Pellegrino, an Italian-American neighbor from whom she first learned

of the joys of Italian food.

Dannenbaum proclaims that, whether "in Italy or America, Italian food is fun food."

HER RECIPES can be made in an hour or less, which makes for relaxed meal preparation as well as enjoyable dining and, although she sometimes offers information on the origin of a recipe, or an explanation of the origin of a recipe, or an explanation of the differences between Italian and Italian-American preparation methods, Dannenbaum presents both cooking styles with equal gusto.

Dannenbaum's recipe for Fettucine with Shrimp and Fresh Peas, reprinted here, is an ideal way to take advantage of fresh peas that are at their peak during the late spring and early summer or fall. Also reprinted is a recipe for Chicken Breasts with Sausage which combines the delicacy of tender chicken breasts with the distinctive flavoring of sweet Italian sausage.

CHICKEN BREASTS WITH SAUSAGE
3 whole chicken breasts, skinned, boned, and halved
2 tsp. oil
1 small onion, chopped
1 garlic clove, chopped
1/2 lb. sweet Italian sausage, casings removed
1/4 cup fresh bread crumbs
1 tsp. chopped flat-leaf parsley
1 tsp. chopped rosemary
Salt and fresh pepper to taste
4 tsp. butter
5 finger-size pieces mozzarella or Fontina cheese
1/4 cup dry white wine
Juice of 1/2 lemon

Flatten the 6 pieces of chicken by pounding with a wet mallet or pound between sheets of wax paper or foil.

Heat the garlic in oil. When hot, add the onion, garlic, and sausage meat. Cook, while stirring with wooden spatula, for about 5 minutes, or until the sausage is cooked through. Using a slotted spoon, remove the mixture to a bowl. Pour off the fat.

Mix the bread crumbs, parsley and rosemary with the sausage. Season with salt and pepper.

Melt the butter in the same skillet. When the foam subsides, sauté the chicken pieces, a few at a time, about 2 minutes a side.

Remove the chicken pieces. Lay them on a board or countertop and divide the filling evenly. Lay cheese on each. Roll up the chicken, tucking in the edges. Tie to secure or fasten with toothpicks. Lay in a baking dish, seam side down.

Add the wine and lemon juice to the skillet. Boil up to deglaze. Swirl around over heat for 1-2 minutes. Pour over the chicken. Bake at 350 degrees for 15-20 minutes. Remove strings or toothpicks.

Serves 6.

FETTUCINE WITH SHRIMP AND FRESH PEAS
1 1/2 lbs. shrimp, peeled and deveined, shells reserved
1 lb. peas, shelled
1 small onion, finely chopped
1/4 cup sliced mushrooms
1/4 cup dry vermouth
2 cups heavy cream
Salt and fresh pepper to taste
1 lb. spinach fettuccine

Place the shrimp shells in water to cover. Bring to a boil. Cover and cook on moderate heat 20 minutes. Strain. Reserve 1 1/4 cups of stock.

Place the peas in a saucepan with just enough water to cover. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to moderate, and cook 10 minutes, or until barely tender.

Add the shrimp to the peas (it may be necessary to add more water but do not add too much). Cook until the shrimp are just poached, 2-3 minutes. Strain and reserve the juices. Place the shrimp and peas back in the pan.

In another saucepan, place the onions, mushrooms, dry vermouth, reserved shrimp stock, and strained juices from shrimp and peas. Reduce over moderate heat to approximately 1 cup.

Add the heavy cream and cook until the mixture coats the back of a metal spoon.

Combine the reduced mixture with the peas and shrimp. Reheat. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve over hot pasta.

Serves 4-6.

Microwave basics

Any microwave owner may be overcome by the amount of microwave containers and accessories on the market today. But don't run out and buy every accessory that looks and sounds terrific until you know your needs.

Many of the basic microwave essentials will already be in your kitchen and suitable for microwave cooking. Always use your microwave owner's manual as a guideline for testing these containers for microwave use.

BASIC CONTAINERS

- Glass measuring cups
- Glass pie plates
- Oblong and round glass casserole dishes
- Glass custard cups
- Plates or platters

If you find that you want to do more complicated microwave cooking, here is a list of optional accessories you may want to purchase:

- Optional accessories
- Browning tray for cookin' meats
- Rack for meats
- Fluted or tube band pan for making cakes
- Muffin ring for muffins, cupcakes or mini-meal loaves



Beer flavors lots of things

Beer just might be the second oldest drink. It dates back to the general region of Asia Minor known as Mesopotamia. One of the first products early man made from harvested grains was beer.

Beer is mentioned in pre-Biblical writings. Noah took some aboard his ark. Babylonians thought enough of the golden brew to name a goddess for it. The Egyptians elevated beer to the status of a national drink and the Ramesses dynasty had a royal brewery.

Beer traveled west, thanks to the civilizations of the Greeks and Romans. The beer produced in the United States evolved from the brew brought to the Colonies by the English and, later, the Germans, who have influenced American beer tastes no end.

Beer also served as a cooking ingredient for centuries. I've cooked with it long before the industry saw the "light."

What would chili be without a can or two of beer? Likewise, beans. I like to use it as a marinade because the fibers of tough meat are no match for the liquid.

Beer is excellent in batters, especially for fish fillets. Beer perks up dips and salad dressings — so "hops" to it.

BEERIZED TACO SALAD DRESSING AND DIP
1 envelope (1 1/2 oz.) dehydrated onion soup mix
1 container (8 oz.) sour cream
1/4 cup beer
1/4 cup chili sauce
1 Tbsp. white vinegar
Hot pepper sauce to taste

In container with lid, combine onion soup mix and sour cream. Stir in remaining ingredients. Use as salad dressing or cover, chill several hours and stir before serving as dip. Yields 2 1/4 cups. Serve with chips or raw vegetables.

BEER BATTERED FISH FILLETS
1 egg, separated
1/2 cup beer, at room temperature
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
2 Tbsp. cornstarch
1/4 tsp. salt
1 1/2 lbs. fish fillets
1/4 cup cooking oil

In mixing bowl, combine egg yolk and beer, blending well. Beat in flour, cornstarch and salt; let stand 1 hour. Beat egg white until almost firm and whisk into batter. Thoroughly dip fillets in batter and fry in hot oil until desired doneness. Serve with lemon wedges. Serves 3-4.

Canned cuisine

There could be good news for those short on time and long on yearning for delicious food. Gourmets on the go can easily fix meals at home using canned food and beverages.

Here are a few ideas that can help you:

- Freeze leftover fruit juices in ice cube trays to add flavor to iced tea or punch.
- Use the syrup from canned fruits to flavor plain yogurt or gelatin or as a topping for waffles and pancakes.
- Purée leftover green vegetables and combine with canned chicken broth and seasonings as a terrific sauce for potatoes or cauliflower.

For a free copy of Continental Can Co.'s Canned Cuisine Cookbook, send a label from any canned food product, along with your name and address, to P.O. Box 5506, Maple Plain, MN 55103. Offer good while supplies last.

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