

## GIANT RAVIOLI WITH SPINACH, RICOTTA, AND EGG YOLK

Makes 6 main-dish servings or 12 starters

This is a labor-intensive dish to make on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. It's worth the effort. The sauce is created inside these giant ravioli, a perfectly soft-boiled egg yolk that will ooze out when you cut the ravioli, enriching both the filling and pasta. Don't separate the eggs until you are assembling the ravioli, because the yolks will become too fragile if they sit. Lay out the ravioli squares and spoon on the filling, then one by one, separate the eggs and gently lay the yolks on the filling.

12 ounces baby spinach or 1½ pounds fresh bunch spinach, stemmed and washed  
1 pound (2 cups) fresh ricotta  
2 garlic cloves, halved, green shoots removed, and finely minced  
¼ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, or a combination of parsley and other sweet herbs such as basil, chervil, tarragon  
¾ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus additional for sprinkling  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper  
Up to ½ cup heavy cream  
1 recipe fresh pasta dough (recipe follows)  
12 large egg yolks  
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil

1. Bring a large pot of generously salted water to a boil and add the spinach. Blanch baby spinach for 10 seconds only (bunch spinach for 20 to 30 seconds), and transfer to a bowl of ice water. Cool for a few minutes, then drain and, taking up a handful at a time, squeeze hard to get out the excess water. Chop fine. You should have about 1 cup chopped spinach.

2. In a large bowl, mix the ricotta, garlic, chopped spinach, parsley, Parmesan, and salt and pepper to taste. Fold in enough cream to make the mixture soft and malleable.

3. Roll out the pasta to thin sheets. Cut twelve 4½-inch squares and twelve 5-inch squares. Cover with a damp cloth while you make the ravioli. Working 2 or 4 squares at a time, spoon 2 tablespoons of the filling onto the middle of each 4½-inch square. With the back of your spoon or with your fingers, make a depression in the middle of the mound. Carefully place an egg yolk in the depression, and season with salt and pepper. Carefully cover the egg yolk with another tablespoon of filling and spread it over, without pressing down, so that it joins the bottom mound of filling. Gently pinch the bottom and top layers together.

4. Brush the edges of the pasta square with water. Place a 5-inch square of pasta over the top and gently pinch the edges together. Continue until you have 12 squares.

5. Bring a large pot of water to a simmer and add a generous tablespoon of salt. Add the giant ravioli. Cook for 5 minutes, until the pasta is cooked al dente (break off a corner of one to test it). Be careful not to allow the water to reach a rolling boil or the ravioli may fall apart. Remove with a skimmer and place 1 or 2 on each deep soup plate. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with Parmesan and freshly ground pepper. Serve at once.

### How to keep ravioli from soaking through

The main challenge when you make ravioli and have to hold it for a while before cooking it—and who doesn't?—is to keep the moist filling from soaking through the pasta. If that happens the pasta will tear when you're transferring it to the pot for cooking. The way to

get around this is to clear a space in your freezer for a half-sheet pan. Line the pan with parchment and sprinkle the parchment generously with semolina. Place the assembled ravioli on the parchment, and immediately place the baking sheet in the freezer. No need to cover if you are just keeping it for a few hours. Transfer directly from the freezer to the simmering water. If it is frozen solid, then you'll need to add a minute or two to the cooking time.

## **FRESH PASTA DOUGH**

Makes 1 pound

This is a simple, straightforward, and definitive pasta recipe. I've seen recipes with more or less egg and more or less semolina. This one is somewhere in the middle and works well.

1 cup all-purpose flour  
1 cup semolina  
½ teaspoon salt  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 large egg  
2 large egg yolks  
Up to 3 tablespoons ice water

1. Mix together the flour, semolina, and salt with your hands in a very large bowl. Make a well in the middle.

2. In a small bowl, beat together the olive oil, egg, and egg yolks. Add the mixture to the well in a steady stream, leaving the last teaspoon in the bowl (if there are any bits of eggshell in the mixture they will be in that last teaspoon). Then, using your fingertips, swirl the flour mixture into the egg mixture. Use your hands to mix together until the mixture is like coarse cornmeal. Add the water a tablespoon at a time, and when the dough can be gathered together into a ball, remove from the bowl and knead briefly, about 5 minutes. The dough will be stiff.

Alternatively, you can mix the dough in a standing mixer fitted with the paddle or in a food processor. If using a standing mixer, add the dry ingredients and mix together. With the machine running at low speed, add the egg mixture (again reserving the last teaspoon) and 1 to 2 tablespoons water. If the dough does not come together and seems dry, add another tablespoon of water and beat on low speed until the dough comes together. Gather it into a ball and knead briefly, about 5 minutes.

If using a food processor, pulse the dry ingredients in the food processor. With the machine running, pour in all but the last teaspoon of the egg yolk mixture and finally the water as needed. When the dough comes together, remove from the food processor and knead briefly, about 5 minutes.

3. Wrap the dough in plastic and let rest for 1 hour.

4. To roll out the dough using a pasta roller, cut the dough into 3 equal pieces. Keep the other pieces covered in plastic while you roll out one piece at a time. Attach the pasta roller securely to a table with a smooth surface. Set the rollers at the widest opening. Flatten the first piece of dough into a thick strip no wider than the machine to enable it to pass through the rollers. If necessary, dust the pasta very lightly with semolina. Run the pasta through the machine. Fold in half crosswise and run through the machine again. Repeat this procedure several more times, until the dough is smooth and elastic. Set the machine to the next smaller opening and run the dough through the rollers twice. Continue rolling and stretching the dough, using a smaller setting each time, until the

ribbons reach the thinness you desire. If they become too long and unwieldy to work with, cut them in half and keep the unused half covered with plastic.

5. Shape and cut the pasta as directed in your recipe. Sprinkle with semolina so it doesn't become sticky. Store for up to 3 days in the refrigerator on a flat tray sprinkled with semolina between sheets of parchment paper.

## **EGGPLANT PARMESAN**

Makes 6 servings

In my quest to give you a reliable collection of classic recipes, here is one for eggplant Parmesan, a dish for which you have no doubt seen many recipes. Eggplant Parmesan is a perfect example of the kind of dish I wanted to include in this book. We've all had perfectly abysmal versions of it—stale, greasy, mushy, rancid, burnt—pick your adjective and it's out there wrapped around eggplant Parmesan along with canned bread crumbs (you might as well use canned eggplant) and Kraft Parmesan, sometimes all of them at once. The key, as always, is the quality of your ingredients, and these are simple and easy to find. The eggplant should be firm and dense with shiny, smooth skin (think college sophomore, male or female); the bread crumbs should come from quality bread; the Parmesan should be Parmigiano-Reggiano; the tomato sauce should be homemade; and the mozzarella should be fresh. If you wilt, bread, and fry your eggplant properly, then you're there. The herbed bread crumbs in this version are particularly tasty. There are two methods you can use for the eggplant: You can salt it and fry it, or you can first roast it in a hot oven instead of salting, then drain, slice, and fry. The second method requires a little less oil than the first.

When breading an ingredient for frying, always have more bread crumbs, flour, and egg for dredging than you think you need. It makes the process easier.

Canola oil  
2 pounds eggplant (2 large)  
Kosher salt  
1 cup dry bread crumbs  
1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese  
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley  
3 large eggs  
2 tablespoons whole milk  
1 cup all-purpose flour  
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
Extra virgin olive oil  
1 recipe Simple Tomato Sauce (recipe follows)  
1/2 pound fresh mozzarella cheese, thinly sliced

### **Prepare the eggplant**

1. Option A: Preheat the oven to 450°F. Cover a baking sheet with foil and oil the foil. Cut the eggplants in half lengthwise and cut the stem ends off. Score with the tip of a sharp knife down the middle of the cut side, almost to the skin, being careful not to cut through the skin. Place, cut side down, on the baking sheet and roast for 20 minutes, until the skin is shriveled and the eggplant is slightly softened but holds its shape when lightly pressed. Remove from the oven and place, cut side down, in a colander set in the sink or over a bowl. Allow to cool and drain for 30 minutes, then slice lengthwise about 1/2 inch thick and season the slices with 1 teaspoon kosher salt.

Option b: Slice the eggplant lengthwise in 1/2-inch-thick slices. Salt generously. Lay on a rack set over a baking sheet, and when you see water beading on the top surface, turn the slices over and salt the other side generously. Let sit 30 minutes, then rinse and pat dry.

2. Prepare the breading ingredients. In a wide baking dish, mix together the bread crumbs, 1/2 cup of the Parmesan, and the parsley. In another bowl, beat together the eggs and milk. In a wide baking dish, mix together the flour, 1 teaspoon salt, and the pepper.

3. Dip the eggplant slices first in the flour, then in the egg, then in the bread crumb and Parmesan mixture, and coat thoroughly. Transfer to a parchment-lined baking sheet and allow to sit for at least 15 minutes so that the surface of the breaded eggplant dries out.

4. Heat 1/4 cup canola oil in a large, heavy frying pan over medium-high heat. When the oil is rippling, just short of smoking, fry the coated eggplant slices in batches until nicely browned on each side and soft in the middle. The roasted slices will take about 1 to 1 1/2 minutes per side. The salted slices will take longer, about 1 1/2 to 2 minutes per side. They should be a dark golden brown; be careful not to burn the coating. Drain the slices on a rack or on paper towels.

5. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Oil a 3-quart gratin dish with olive oil. Cover the bottom of the dish with 1/2 cup of the tomato sauce. Top with the eggplant slices, overlapping them in a single layer. Spread half the remaining tomato sauce down the middle of the eggplant layer, and top with the sliced mozzarella in a single layer. Top with the remaining tomato sauce, again spooning it down the middle of the casserole. Sprinkle on 1/2 cup Parmesan, and drizzle on a tablespoon of olive oil. Bake 30 minutes, or until browned and bubbling.

## **SIMPLE TOMATO SAUCE**

Makes 2 cups

Tomato sauces don't get much simpler than this one, especially if you use canned tomatoes, which I recommend if you're making the sauce any time other than the peak of tomato season, July through October.

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
2 fat or 4 medium garlic cloves, halved, green shoots removed, and thinly sliced  
2 pounds fresh ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and roughly chopped, or one 28-ounce can chopped tomatoes, with juice  
1/2 to 1 teaspoon kosher salt  
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
As mall handful of basil leaves, without the stems

Heat the olive oil with the sliced garlic in a heavy saucepan over medium-low heat and simmer the garlic gently until transparent, about 3 minutes. Add the tomatoes, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and the pepper and simmer 45 minutes, stirring often to make sure the sauce does not stick to the pan, until thick. If you have used canned tomatoes, crush the tomatoes with the back of your spoon to get a finer texture. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Stir in the basil and remove from the heat. Allow the basil to infuse for 15 minutes or longer, then remove. This will keep for 5 days in the refrigerator, and freezes well.

## **Tomato Story**

Ripeness, above all, determines the quality of a tomato. When I went to UC Davis to study agriculture, one day in late June I picked up a tomato in a field that was just about to be harvested for ketchup or canning. This tomato was an industrial tomato, grown with

pesticides and chemical fertilizer. But it had ripened on the vine, and it had a sweet, rich, sun-filled flavor that only a truly vine-ripened tomato can have. This is the taste I look for when I buy tomatoes, and if I can't find it in a fresh one, I turn to canned.

### **Seeding tomatoes and retaining the sweetest part**

The gelatinous, juicy seed of a tomato contains some of the fruit's sweetest, most intense flavors. When you seed tomatoes, place a strainer over a bowl. Cut the tomatoes in half at the equator and squeeze over the strainer. Rub the seeds and surrounding pulp against the strainer so the juice goes through. Add the juice to your dish along with the chopped tomatoes.

## **CHOCOLATE PUDDING WITH WHIPPED CREAM**

Makes 8 servings

If Jell-O Pudding could fantasize about becoming something great, this would be it. Lighter and less intense than pots de crème, the creamy, comforting pudding with a whisper of mint added to the chocolate is very popular at the restaurant. We serve it in whiskey glasses. Note how little peppermint extract is needed here. You have to use this ingredient with caution. Mint is delicious right up to the point where it turns awful.

4 cups whole milk  
1 cup sugar  
Pinch of salt  
1/3 cup Dutch process cocoa powder  
1/3 cup cornstarch  
3 large egg yolks  
2 ounces bittersweet chocolate (70%), finely chopped  
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut in small pieces  
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract  
1/4 teaspoon peppermint extract  
Whipped cream or Whipped Crème Fraîche (recipe follows) for serving

1. In a large saucepan, combine the milk, 1/2 cup of sugar, and the salt and bring to a boil over medium heat. Remove from the heat.
2. In a small bowl, combine the remaining 1/2 cup of sugar, the cocoa powder, and the cornstarch. Sprinkle this slowly into the milk, whisking constantly. Return to the heat and whisk constantly until thick and bubbling. Remove from the heat, make sure the mixture isn't boiling, and one at a time, whisk in the egg yolks, then the chocolate, butter, vanilla, and peppermint extract. Whisk constantly until the chocolate has dissolved. Return to low heat and whisk constantly until the mixture thickens again, being careful that it does not boil, then immediately remove from the heat and strain into a bowl.
3. Spoon into whiskey glasses (the pudding will fill about two-thirds of the glass) and cover with plastic. If you don't want a skin to form, place the plastic directly over the pudding. Chill in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours. Top with a generous spoonful of whipped cream or whipped crème fraîche, and serve.

### **Whipped Crème Fraîche**

3 tablespoons crème fraîche  
1/2 cup heavy cream  
2 teaspoons sugar  
Combine all of ingredients in a bowl and whip to soft peaks. Refrigerate in a covered bowl until ready to use.