

# Italian Comfort Food

I don't think we have done Italian in a while, so I went with warm Italian classics. I will make the Osso Buco, and I will try to find a good Italian cocktail to server.

Carole, feel free to mix up some Focaccia or some other Italian bread for the meal.

## Appetizer

### [Caprese Appetizer](#)

Note: This recipe makes 20 appetizers, but feel free to make a few more.

#### Ingredients

20 grape tomatoes

10 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, cubed

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons fresh basil leaves, chopped

1 pinch salt

1 pinch ground black pepper

20 toothpicks

#### Directions

Toss tomatoes, mozzarella cheese, olive oil, basil, salt, and pepper together in a bowl until well coated. Skewer one tomato and one piece of mozzarella cheese on each toothpick.

## Soup

### [Minestrone Soup](#)

Note: This recipe only serves four, so you will have to triple it.

#### Ingredients

3 cups reduced-sodium vegetable or chicken broth

1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes

1 (15-ounce) can white (cannellini or navy) beans, drained

2 carrots, peeled and chopped

1 celery stalk, chopped

1 cup onion, chopped

1 teaspoon dried thyme

1/2 teaspoon dried sage

2 bay leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

2 cups cooked ditalini pasta

1 medium zucchini, chopped

2 cups coarsely chopped fresh or frozen spinach, defrosted

4 tablespoons grated Parmesan or Romano cheese

Basil sprigs, garnish, optional

#### Directions

In a slow cooker, combine broth, tomatoes, beans, carrots, celery, onion, thyme, sage, bay leaves, and 1/2 teaspoon each salt and black pepper. Cover and cook on LOW for 6 to 8 hours or on HIGH for 3 to 4 hours.

Thirty minutes before the soup is done cooking, add ditalini, zucchini and spinach. Cover and cook 30 more minutes. Remove bay leaves and season, to taste, with salt and black pepper. Ladle soup into bowls and sprinkle parmesan cheese over top. Garnish with basil, if desired.

## Side

### [Parmesan Broccoli](#)

Note: This recipe needs to be doubled

#### Ingredients

1 head broccoli cut into florets

olive oil

breadcrumbs (I would recommend panko breadcrumbs)

parmesan cheese (I would recommend a LOT)

salt and pepper to taste

#### Directions

Preheat a baking sheet on the lower rack in a 450 oven. Blanch 1 head chopped broccoli in boiling water with salt and sliced garlic for 1 minute; drain. Toss with a splash of olive oil, a handful each of breadcrumbs and parmesan, salt and pepper. Place on the hot baking sheet and top with more cheese and breadcrumbs; roast until golden, 15 minutes

## Side

### [Polenta](#)

Note: This recipe needs to be doubled

#### Ingredients

4 cups chicken stock, preferably homemade

2 teaspoons minced garlic (2 cloves)

1 cup yellow cornmeal, preferably stone-ground

1 tablespoon kosher salt

1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus extra for serving

1/4 cup crème fraîche

2 tablespoons (1/4 stick) unsalted butter

#### Directions

Place the chicken stock in a large saucepan. Add the garlic and cook over medium-high heat until the stock comes to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low and very slowly whisk in the cornmeal, whisking constantly to make sure there are no lumps. Switch to a wooden spoon, add the salt and pepper, and simmer, stirring almost constantly, for 10 minutes, until thick. Be sure to scrape the bottom of the pan thoroughly while you're stirring. Off the heat, stir in the Parmesan, crème fraîche, and butter. Taste for seasonings and serve hot with extra Parmesan cheese to sprinkle on top.

## Main

### [Osso Buco](#)

#### Ingredients

1 sprig fresh rosemary

1 sprig fresh thyme

1 dry bay leaf

2 whole cloves

Cheesecloth

Kitchen twine, for bouquet garni and tying the veal shanks

3 whole veal shanks (about 1 pound per shank), trimmed

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

All purpose flour, for dredging

1/2 cup vegetable oil

1 small onion, diced into 1/2-inch cubes

1 small carrot, diced into 1/2-inch cubes

1 stalk celery, diced into 1/2 inch cubes

1 tablespoon tomato paste

1 cup dry white wine

3 cups chicken stock

3 tablespoons fresh flat-leaf Italian parsley, chopped

1 tablespoon lemon zest

#### Directions

Place the rosemary, thyme, bay leaf and cloves into cheesecloth and secure with twine. This will be your bouquet garni.

For the veal shanks, pat dry with paper towels to remove any excess moisture. Veal shanks will brown better when they are dry. Secure the meat to the bone with the kitchen twine. Season each shank with salt and freshly ground pepper. Dredge the shanks in flour, shaking off excess.

In a large Dutch oven pot, heat vegetable oil until smoking. Add tied veal shanks to the hot pan and brown all sides, about 3 minutes per side. Remove browned shanks and reserve.

In the same pot, add the onion, carrot and celery. Season with salt at this point to help draw out the moisture from the vegetables. Sauté until soft and translucent, about 8 minutes. Add the tomato paste and mix well. Return browned shanks to the pan and add the white wine and reduce liquid by half, about 5 minutes. Add the bouquet garni and 2 cups of the chicken stock and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, cover pan and simmer for about 1 1/2 hours or until the meat is falling off the bone. Check every

15 minutes, turning shanks and adding more chicken stock as necessary. The level of cooking liquid should always be about 3/4 the way up the shank.

Carefully remove the cooked shanks from the pot and place in decorative serving platter. Cut off the kitchen twine and discard.

Remove and discard bouquet garni from the pot.

Pour all the juices and sauce from the pot over the shanks. Garnish with chopped parsley and lemon zest.

## Dessert

### Tiramisu

Note: This recipe serves eight, but after everything else, I'm guessing that will be enough.

#### Ingredients

6 large egg yolks

3/4 cup sugar

3/4 cup whole milk

Four 8-ounce containers mascarpone cheese, at room temperature

1 1/2 cups espresso or strong coffee, at room temperature

1/2 cup brandy or cognac

30 to 32 crisp Italian ladyfingers (savoiardi)

1/4 cup Dutch-process cocoa powder

Bittersweet chocolate, for shaving

#### Directions

Line an 8-inch-square baking dish with plastic wrap, leaving a 3-inch overhang on all sides. Fill a large bowl with ice water.

Make the custard: Whisk the egg yolks and sugar in a heatproof bowl set over a saucepan of barely simmering water (do not let the bowl touch the water) until the sugar dissolves. Slowly whisk in the milk

and cook, whisking constantly, until the custard is light and foamy, about 10 minutes (a thermometer inserted into the mixture should register 170 degrees F).

Remove the bowl from the saucepan and set in the bowl of ice water; whisk until the custard is cool, about 1 minute. Put the mascarpone in a large bowl. Fold the custard into the mascarpone with a rubber spatula until almost combined, then whisk until just smooth (do not over mix or the custard will be grainy).

Combine the espresso and brandy in a shallow bowl. One at a time, dip the ladyfingers in the espresso mixture until soaked but not soggy; arrange 2 rows of about 5 biscuits each in the baking dish. Spread one-third of the mascarpone custard over the ladyfingers. Repeat with a second layer of espresso-dipped ladyfingers, arranging them in the opposite direction. Top with another one-third of the custard. Repeat with the remaining ladyfingers, alternating directions. Spread the remaining custard on top and dust with the cocoa powder. Cover with plastic wrap; refrigerate at least 4 hours, or overnight.

Invert a plate on top of the tiramisu, then flip the tiramisu with the plate. Remove the baking dish and plastic wrap. Invert a serving plate on top of the tiramisu and flip again so it is cocoa-side up. Remove the remaining plastic wrap. Shave curls of chocolate on top with a vegetable peeler.