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Ricotta and aubergine gnocchi with a sicilian style sauce

Introduction

This is a gorgeous dish and came (in part) from an Australian magazine (I'm sorry i can't remember which Chef!). It so impressed me visually that i couldn't wait to get it on my menu. It proved very popular.

There is just one thing to note. If you are using the soft ricotta that you will find in most supermarkets use the recipe as it is. If you are using the very firm ricotta often found only in Italian deli's or Italian food suppliers half the amount of flour in the recipe.

If you want the criss cross patterns on the aubergine you will need a ridged griddle pan



Step 1 - make the gnocchi filling

For the gnocchi

750g (1lb 9oz) ricotta cheese
6 egg yolks
200g (8oz) plain flour
150g (5oz) grated parmesan cheese
1 handful flat leaf parsley
1 handful fresh basil leaf
75g (3oz) toasted pine nuts
100g (4oz) sultanas
1 knob of butter
1 small onion
2 cloves of garlic
1 glass of white wine
Salt and black pepper

Place all of the ingredients up to and including the sultanas into a large bowl but don't yet mix them together. Heat the butter in a small pan and sauté the chopped onion and crushed garlic. When they are just starting to brown add the white wine and simmer the mixture until most of the wine has evaporated away. Take the onions off the heat and add them to the mixture in the bowl. Mix everything together and leave it in the fridge for at least 2 hours.



Chefs tip

It is very difficult to give exact quantities for the flour. The best way is to test the result. Have some boiling water at the ready, add the amount of flour as recommended in the recipe, and cook one dumpling. If it breaks apart easily add more flour to the mix. What you are looking for is a texture that is firm enough to hold the shape but not so firm that they'll bounce off the plate.

Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil. Using two large spoons form the ricotta mix into large 'quenelles' plunge them into the boiling water and allow them to simmer for about 40 seconds. Fish them out quickly and place them on a tray to cool. Do this in small batches of two or three and allow three per person. If don't want quenelles one could roll or mould them into sausage shapes. The idea is just to have a shape to roll the sauteed aubergine around.



Chefs tip

Making quenelles is a bit of a tricky business and requires a little practice. You will need two large spoons one in each hand.

Have a pot of warm water next to you when you do this. hold the large spoon in your right hand (if you are right handed) and take a blob of the ricotta mix. Just enough to fill the spoon.

Dip the spoon in your left hand into the warm water and scoop the mix from the right hand spoon onto the left hand spoon.

Dip the right hand spoon into the warm water and scoop the mixture off the left hand spoon.

Transferring the mixture from spoon to spoon like this creates a smooth sided 'quenelle'. When you are happy with the shape drop the dumpling into the water.

The ricotta gnocchi are much easier to work with when chilled so prepare them well in advance and fridge them for at least a couple of hours.

Step 1 – roll the gnocchi

To finish you will need:

3 to 4 aubergines

olive oil

Salt and black pepper

Cut the aubergines into quite thick slices, brush them with olive oil and then griddle them both sides until golden brown. If you have a lined griddle plate try to create a criss cross pattern on the aubergines by turning them 90 degrees half way through cooking them. The pattern will make the final dish much more attractive. Season them with salt and black pepper as you cook.

When you have finished wrap each gnocchi with a slice of aubergine. They can be reheated as they are by

baking them lightly for 15 minutes in a medium to hot oven.



Serve on the Sicilian style sauce with a small rocket salad in the centre. You can lightly dress the rocket with olive oil and lemon juice.

Step 3 - make the sauce

Sicilian tomato sauce

Knob of butter

1 small onion

1 teaspoon garlic

500ml (1 pint) tomato sauce or passata

10 chopped olives

2 dessertspoons capers

Handful sultanas

A dash of balsamic vinegar

Pan fry the chopped onions and crushed garlic in the butter until soft and starting to brown. Whizz up the tomato sauce (or you can use PASSATA) and add this to the pan. Add the remaining ingredients and slow simmer for your lowest heat for 20 to 30 minutes. Season with salt and black pepper.