

# Antipasti

An Antipasto Platter

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**T**he word *antipasto* comes from Latin and means “before the meal.” In the strictest sense, an antipasto is a little something extra as a starter. It is a small snack meant to awaken the appetite, not to satisfy it.

In Italy, unless it is a special occasion, home-cooked meals rarely start with an antipasto, though restaurant meals often do. Antipasto dishes also vary a lot by region. In the north, especially in the Piedmont, a long succession of antipasto dishes are served one at a time at formal dinners. The classic antipasto in Tuscany is *crostini* (toasted bread) with chicken livers and a few slices of salami such as *finocchiona*, a regional specialty made with ground pork and flavored with fennel seeds. In southern Italy, antipasti are simpler, often just a few slices of dried sausage or prosciutto, pickled vegetables, and olives.

When I have company, I often serve an antipasto. Olives, sliced *salumi* (a collective word for cold cuts), and cut up raw vegetables are the easiest antipasto, and a nice way to welcome guests as they gather. More elaborate dishes can serve as a first course, and a group of antipasti can form the basis for a buffet meal.

Antipasto dishes can be served hot, room temperature, or cold. With the exception of dried sausages and cured meats like *salame*, prosciutto, or mortadella, meat is used sparingly, usually ground or chopped as a vegetable stuffing. Though shellfish is often offered as an antipasto, whole fish is usually not, except for tiny fish such as anchovies or whitebait.

Many other dishes throughout this book can be served as antipasti. From the vegetable chapters, fried artichokes or cauliflower, any of the stuffed or grilled vegetables, and salads are always good choices. Many of the sautéed vegetable dishes are good as starters, served warm or at room temperature.

Slices of focaccia or olive- or cheese-flavored breads are good companions for vegetable antipasti. Pasta salads are rarely seen in Italy, but Italians do serve rice salads frequently as part of an antipasto assortment. Cold seafood salads are popular, as are stuffed shellfish, such as clams, mussels, and oysters.



## An Antipasto Platter

An assortment of antipasti is a great way to start a casual meal or a special dinner. Platters of sliced meats, cheeses, and preserved vegetables decoratively arranged are great for parties. Use your imagination to place the ingredients so that the colors and shapes complement one another. For best flavor, the ingredients should be at room temperature or just slightly chilled.

Here are some suggestions for a typical antipasto assortment. Serve accompanied by crunchy breadsticks and crusty Italian bread or focaccia.

### Salumi

Serve one or two slices per person of three of the following meats. Fold or roll up the slices for easier serving.

**mortadella:** a specialty of Emilia-Romagna; large, mildly spiced smooth-textured pork sausage, with chunks of fat and sometimes pistachios.

**prosciutto:** from all over Italy (the best-known here is from Parma or San Daniele in Friuli-Venezia Giulia); a whole pork leg cured with salt.

**capocollo:** from all over Italy; cured pork shoulder, can be either mild or spiced with hot pepper.

**salami:** from all over Italy; usually ground pork, though other meats may be used, with various spices and seasonings including black peppercorns, fennel seeds, crushed red pepper, wine. There are many different varieties.

**sopressata:** from all over Italy; a large, wide salame made of coarsely ground lean pork and pork fat, flavored with black peppercorns, or crushed red pepper, salt, and red wine.

**peperoni:** in North America, a long, thin dried sausage made of coarsely ground pork

with either black peppercorns or crushed red pepper. In Italy, the word *peperoni* means bell peppers, not a dried hot sausage.

### Cheeses

Serve one wedge of one variety of cheese. Buy cheeses in large chunks and cut them into wedges for serving. Look for aged cheeses imported from Italy.

**provolone:** from all over Italy. Do not use the bland, sliced variety. Imported provolone is sharp and slightly smoky-flavored.

**young pecorino:** mostly from central and southern Italy; semifirm and mild to sharp in flavor, depending on the variety and origin.

**fresh or smoked mozzarella:** mild, soft and creamy; can be either salted or unsalted. Fresh mozzarella should be very moist and eaten the same day that it is made. Smoked mozzarella is drier, with smoky flavor and firmer texture.

**ricotta salata:** a pressed and salted version of ricotta, mild, firm, and crumbly.

### Pickles and vegetables

One or two varieties of the following preserved vegetables should be sufficient.

marinated artichokes, mushrooms, or dried tomatoes.

hot or mild vinegar peppers or peperoncini.

*giardiniera:* mixed pickled vegetables (page 45).

### Garnishes

Decorate the platter with anchovy fillets, sliced tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, lettuce or radicchio, and carrot and celery sticks.

## Cheese Antipasti

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### Goat Cheese with Herbs *Caprino alle Erbe*

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

Capra is Italian for “goat,” and caprino is the name given to Italian goat cheese. Look for a mild, fresh goat cheese for this recipe. If Italian goat cheese is not available, use an American or French goat cheese. Their flavors are very similar.

- 8 ounces fresh mild goat cheese**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh herbs, such as chives, rosemary, parsley, basil, thyme**
- ¼ teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper**
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- Fresh herbs for garnish**
- Thin slices of toasted Italian bread**

- 1** Mash the cheese in a medium bowl with a fork or spoon. Stir in the herbs and pepper.
- 2** Spoon the cheese mixture onto the center of a piece of plastic wrap. Bring one end of the plastic over the cheese to meet the other end. Tuck the plastic around the cheese and shape the cheese into a log. Roll the log to secure the shape. Refrigerate one hour up to overnight.
- 3** Unwrap the cheese and place it on a serving plate. Drizzle with the oil. Garnish with sprigs of fresh herbs. Serve with toasted Italian bread.

### Goat Cheese, Valle d’Aosta Style

#### *Tomini di Courmayeur*

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

*Courmayeur, a popular ski resort in the Valle d’Aosta, is just across the border from France through the Mont Blanc tunnel. The local dialect sounds more French than Italian. Though the region is best known for its cow’s milk cheeses, such as Fontina Valle d’Aosta, small goat cheeses, known locally as tommini, are eaten with the local dark rye bread, or drizzled with honey for dessert. I enjoyed goat cheese with a crunchy, flavorful topping at La Maison de Filippo, a rustic country inn that serves hearty meals in a charming setting.*

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 2 tablespoons wine vinegar**
- 1 garlic clove, minced**
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme**
- Pinch of crushed red pepper**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 cup finely chopped tender celery**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**
- 2 sage leaves, chopped**
- 8 ounces fresh mild goat cheese**
- Thin slices toasted Italian or French bread**

- 1** In a medium bowl, whisk together the oil, vinegar, garlic, thyme, red pepper, and salt and black pepper to taste. Stir in the celery, parsley, and sage.
- 2** Place the cheese on a serving plate. Pour the sauce over the cheese. Cover and let stand 1 hour at room temperature. Serve with toasted bread.

# Gorgonzola-Stuffed Endive

## *Indivia Rapiene*

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

*The large endive family of vegetables includes many that are used in Italian kitchens, including several kinds of chicory, escarole, and radicchio. Belgian endive grows in small pointed heads that are kept covered as they mature. The covering prevents photosynthesis, so that the endive remains white with yellowish tips instead of turning green as it would if allowed to develop naturally. It also keeps the leaves tender and the flavor delicate. Their long spear shape makes Belgian endive leaves perfect containers for stuffing or dipping. Here the filling is a classic flavor combination of creamy gorgonzola and crunchy toasted walnuts.*

- 8 ounces gorgonzola cheese, rind removed**
- 4 ounces mascarpone**
- 2 to 4 tablespoons milk**
- 4 medium Belgian endive, separated into leaves**
- 1/4 cup coarsely chopped toasted walnuts**

- 1 In a medium bowl, mash the two cheeses together with a fork. Stir in just enough of the milk to make the mixture soft and spreadable.
- 2 Arrange the endive leaves on a platter. Spoon the cheese mixture into the leaves. Sprinkle with the walnuts and serve immediately.

# Warm Ricotta in Fresh Tomato Sauce

## *Ricotta Calda in Salsa di Pomodori Freschi*

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

*Warm creamy ricotta in a pool of fresh tomato sauce is a heavenly starter that I first encountered at Remi, one of my favorite Italian restaurants in New*

*York. Tangy sheep's milk ricotta is preferred, though cow's milk ricotta works well too. Serve with fresh Italian bread.*

- 8 ripe plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped**
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- Salt**
- Pinch of crushed red pepper**
- 6 fresh basil leaves, torn into bits**
- 1 cup whole- or part-skim ricotta**

- 1 In a medium saucepan, combine the tomatoes, oil, salt, and red pepper. Bring to a simmer. Cook until the tomatoes are just softened, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat. Add half the basil leaves.
- 2 In a medium bowl, whisk the ricotta with the remaining basil, and salt and pepper to taste.
- 3 Spread the tomato sauce on 4 small plates or shallow bowls. With an ice cream scoop, shape the ricotta mixture into 4 balls and place them on top of the sauce. Serve warm.

# Provolone in Pizza Sauce

## *Provolone alla Pizzaiola*

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

*In a pizzeria in Naples, I had provolone cheese heated until it was just barely melted, in a spicy tomato sauce. It makes a good lunch, accompanied by bread and a green salad.*

- 2 1/2 cups Pizzaiola Sauce (page 91)**
- 8 ounces aged provolone, rind removed and cut into 1/4-inch slices**
- Pinch of dried oregano**

- 1 Prepare the sauce, if necessary.
- 2 In a medium skillet, bring the sauce to a simmer over medium heat. Add the cheese slices and sprinkle with the oregano. Remove from the heat and let stand 3 to 4 minutes or until the cheese begins to melt. Serve immediately.

# Grilled Mozzarella

## *Mozzarella ai Ferri*

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

*One summer in Rome, my favorite luncheon dish was fresh mozzarella grilled until it had a golden crust outside and was warm and melty inside. Most days I ate it with a salad of arugula, tomatoes, and sweet onions.*

*A nonstick skillet or griddle is essential here, and for best results, the cheese, which can be very moist when freshly made, must be quite dry.*

**1 pound fresh mozzarella, cut into 1/2-inch-thick slices**

**1** If the mozzarella is very moist, lay the slices on paper towels to drain the excess moisture. Refrigerate one hour, turning the slices once.

**2** Place a nonstick skillet over medium heat. When a drop of water flicked onto the skillet bounces and evaporates quickly, the pan is ready.

**3** Place a slice of the mozzarella in the skillet. When it begins to turn brown around the edge, turn it over with a spatula. Cook 1 minute more. Repeat with the remaining slices. Serve hot.

# Grilled Cheese and Prosciutto Skewers

## *Spiedini di Formaggio e Prosciutto*

MAKES 6 TO 8 SERVINGS

*Tuscan friends Anna and Lucio Trebino prepared dinner on the barbecue one summer night. I loved the appetizers that Anna served: balls of goat cheese wrapped in crisped prosciutto. The skewers can be assembled several hours ahead of time and stored covered in the refrigerator until ready to cook. Anna says this works well with cubes of semifirm cheeses like mozzarella in place of the goat cheese.*

**6 to 8 ounces fresh goat cheese**

**1/2 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper**

**8 thin slices imported Italian prosciutto, cut in half crosswise**

**1** In a small bowl, mash the cheese with the pepper. Divide the cheese into 16 pieces. Shape the pieces into balls. Spear the cheese balls on short bamboo skewers. Tightly wind a piece of the prosciutto around each ball of cheese.

**2** Preheat the broiler. Broil the skewers 2 to 3 minutes, turning often until the prosciutto is lightly browned. Serve hot.

# Montasio Cheese Crisps

## *Frico*

MAKES ABOUT 2 DOZEN

*In Friuli–Venezia Giulia, montasio, a cow’s milk cheese, is used to make frico, thin crispy cheese wafers. If montasio is not available, use Parmigiano-Reggiano or Grana Padano. Though frico is often made in a skillet on the stovetop, I find the results are more reliable in the oven.*

*The fragile crisps are good with a glass of sparkling prosecco, or serve them as an accompaniment to soup.*

**4 ounces freshly grated montasio**

**2 ounces freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano**

**1** Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a small bowl, mix the two cheeses together. On a large heavy ungreased baking sheet, sprinkle about 1 tablespoon of the cheese in a thin layer in the form of a disk about 2 inches in diameter. Make as many additional disks as will fit comfortably about 1 inch apart.

**2** Bake in the center of the oven 8 minutes or until the cheese is melted and lightly golden.

**3** Place several overturned juice glasses on a countertop. When the cheese crisps are done, remove the baking sheet from the oven. Working quickly (because they firm up rapidly as they cool), remove the cheese wafers from the baking sheet one by one with a thin metal spatula, then gently mold the disks over the glasses. Let cool until firm. Carefully remove the cheese crisps from the glasses. Repeat baking and molding the remaining cheese.

**4** Store in an airtight container up to 1 week.

# Melted Cheese, Silversmith's Style

## *Formaggio all'Argentiera*

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

*According to Mary Taylor Simeti's book Pomp and Sustenance: Twenty-Five Centuries of Sicilian Food, this recipe gets its name from an unknown, and perhaps mythical, silversmith who invented it to disguise the fact that he had fallen on hard times. The aroma of the cheese, garlic, vinegar, and oregano cooking is said to be similar to rabbit, and the silversmith wanted his neighbors to believe that he could still afford meat. Serve with crisp bread and a bottle of red wine.*

*Provolone in Italy is not the same as the bland cheese of that name we often see in the United States. Imported Italian provolone is aromatic and slightly smoky, mild when young and sharp when aged. Many cheese shops sell imported provolone, or you can substitute caciocavallo, which is similar in flavor and texture to provolone, though it comes in a different shape. Asiago is a cheese from northern Italy that takes very well to this treatment.*

**6 to 8 ounces imported provolone, caciocavallo,  
or Asiago cheese**

**2 tablespoons olive oil**

**2 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced**

**2 tablespoons white wine vinegar**

**1/2 teaspoon dried oregano**

**1** Remove the rind from the cheese and cut the cheese into 1/2-inch-thick slices.

**2** In a large heavy skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook until just beginning to turn golden, 1 to 2 minutes.

**3** Place the cheese slices in a single layer on top of the garlic. Raise the heat and add the vinegar. Cook 1 to 2 minutes or until the cheese just begins to melt.

**4** With a metal spatula, quickly turn the slices and sprinkle with the oregano. Cook 1 to 2 minutes more or until the cheese is slightly melted and bubbling around the edges. Transfer to serving dishes and serve hot.

# Mozzarella in a Carriage

## *Mozzarella in Carrozza*

MAKES 4 TO 8 SERVINGS

*I love the whimsical name of this Neapolitan version of a toasted cheese sandwich. It makes me think of royalty, though in this case, it is a slice of mozzarella, not a king and queen, riding in a coach made of sliced bread. This was a favorite lunchtime sandwich when I was growing up. Cut into pieces, it also makes a nice appetizer.*

**1 cup milk**

**3 large eggs**

**1/2 teaspoon salt**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**3/4 cup all-purpose flour**

**12 ounces fresh mozzarella, cut into slices to fit  
the bread**

**12 to 16 slices Italian bread**

**3 tablespoons unsalted butter**

**1** In a medium bowl, whisk together the milk, eggs, and salt and pepper to taste. Spread the flour on a sheet of wax paper.

**2** Sandwich the cheese between two slices of bread. Dip the sandwiches in the milk mixture, then turn them in the flour.

**3** Melt two tablespoons of the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the sandwiches and cook, flattening them with a metal spatula, until browned on both sides, about 3 minutes per side. Serve hot.

# Roman Skewered Mozzarella Sandwiches

## *Spiedini alla Romana*

MAKES 4 TO 8 SERVINGS

*If you don't want to use the anchovies in the sauce, leave them out and just drizzle the sandwiches with the garlic butter.*

**12 (1/2-inch-thick) slices Italian or French bread**

**8 ounces fresh mozzarella, cut into 8 slices**

**4 tablespoons unsalted butter**

**1 tablespoon olive oil**

**1 garlic clove, peeled and finely chopped**

**6 anchovy fillets**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**1** Preheat the oven to 450°F. Brush a baking sheet with oil.

**2** On each of 4 short skewers, thread 3 slices of the bread alternately with 2 slices of mozzarella, beginning and ending with the bread. Place on the prepared baking sheet. Bake in the center of the oven 20 minutes or until the bread is toasted and the cheese is slightly melted.

**3** Meanwhile, in a small skillet, melt the butter with the oil and garlic over medium heat. Add the anchovies and pepper to taste and stir until the anchovies dissolve.

**4** Transfer the skewers to a warm serving platter, sliding the bread and cheese off the skewers. Pour the sauce over the sandwiches and serve immediately.

# Parmesan Custards

## *Tartra*

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

*Individual baked custards flavored with cheese or vegetables are favorite appetizers in the Piedmont region of northern Italy. I like to serve these as an elegant appetizer or brunch dish with spinach, mushrooms, cherry tomatoes, or other vegetables braised in a little butter.*

**1 cup heavy cream**

**1/4 cup milk**

**2 fresh sage leaves**

**2-inch sprig fresh rosemary**

**2 tablespoons unsalted butter**

**1/4 cup finely chopped onion**

**2 large eggs**

**2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano**

**Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg**

**1/2 teaspoon salt**

**1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**

**Salt**

**1** In a bowl, combine the cream, milk, sage, and rosemary. Cover and refrigerate 2 hours up to overnight.

**2** Melt the butter in a small skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until tender, about 5 minutes.

**3** Place a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter four 6-ounce custard cups.

**4** In a large bowl, beat the eggs until well blended. Pour the cream mixture through a fine-mesh strainer into the eggs. Stir in the onion, cheese, nutmeg, salt, and pepper. Pour mixture into the prepared cups.

**5** Place a roasting pan in the oven. Pour 1/2 inch hot water into the pan. Place the custard cups in the pan. Bake for 55 minutes or until the tops are lightly golden and the custards are just set. Remove the custards from the pan and let stand 15 minutes.

**6** Run a small knife around the inside of the cups and invert them onto serving plates. Serve warm.

# Walnut Cheese Wafers

## *Biscotti al Parmigiano*

MAKES 48

*Though they may look like dessert cookies, these buttery biscuits belong to the category of foods Italians call salatini, literally little salted things. Salatini are perfect with drinks or a glass of wine. You can serve them as an appetizer with olives and salame or with a bowl of soup or a salad for lunch.*

**1 1/4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour**

**4 ounces freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano**

**1/4 teaspoon salt**

**1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into bits**

**1/2 cup walnuts, toasted and finely chopped**

**About 2 tablespoons milk**

**1 large egg**

**1** In a medium bowl, stir together the flour, cheese, and salt. With a pastry blender or a fork, blend in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Stir in the nuts.

**2** In a small bowl, beat together the milk and egg. Pour the mixture over the dry ingredients and stir just until moistened. Add more milk, a teaspoon or so at a time, if needed to moisten the dough. Squeeze the dough together and form it into a ball.

**3** Cut the dough into two equal pieces. Shape each piece into a 7-inch log and place each on a sheet of plastic wrap. Wrap tightly and refrigerate until firm, 4 hours up to overnight.

**4** Place a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Butter two large baking sheets.

**5** Cut the logs into 1/4-inch slices and arrange the slices 1 inch apart on the prepared baking sheets. Bake until the biscuits are lightly browned around the edges, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer to wire racks to cool. Serve at room temperature. Store in an airtight container up to 2 weeks.

# Gorgonzola Biscuits

## *Biscotti di Gorgonzola*

MAKES 2 DOZEN

*Gorgonzola, a blue cheese made from cow's milk in the Lombardy region of Italy, comes in two forms. Dolce is the milder, younger variety; stagionato or piccante, sometimes called mountain gorgonzola, is older and sharper, with more of the blue-green mold that gives the cheese its distinct flavor. For these biscuits, I prefer the younger form of the cheese.*

**1 stick (4 ounces) unsalted butter, softened**

**8 ounces imported Italian gorgonzola dolce, rind removed**

**2 egg yolks**

**1/4 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg**

**1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**

**2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour**

**1 egg white, beaten**

**2 teaspoons sesame seeds**

**1** In a large mixing bowl, beat the butter until it is fluffy. Add the cheese a little at a time, beating until well blended. Beat in the egg yolks, nutmeg, and pepper.

**2** Add the flour and stir until smooth. Shape the dough into a disk and wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate 30 minutes up to overnight.

**3** Place a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 450°F. Butter and flour a large baking sheet.

**4** Roll out the dough between two sheets of plastic wrap to a 1/4-inch thickness. With a 2-inch round cookie cutter, cut out the biscuits. Place the biscuits on the prepared baking sheet. Gather the scraps together and, handling them as little as possible, roll out and cut the dough scraps in the same way. Brush the tops with the beaten egg white. Sprinkle with the sesame seeds.

**5** Bake 12 to 14 minutes or until lightly browned around the edges. Transfer to a wire rack to cool. Serve at room temperature. Store in an airtight container for up to 2 weeks.

### Marinated Olives

#### Olive Marinade

MAKES 6 TO 8 SERVINGS

*For many Italians, a bowl of good olives and chewy bread can be a whole meal. Brine- or oil-cured olives are full of flavor. Most come from Italy, France, or Greece, and you can usually find them sold by weight in the deli section of the grocery store. Avoid the bland, mushy black olives sold in cans.*

*Olives take well to a variety of marinades. You can vary these by adding hot pepper, herbs, celery leaves, or strips of sun-dried tomatoes. Try a mix of several types of both green and black varieties, if you like.*

**8 ounces Gaeta or other mild black olives**

**1 lemon**

**1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil**

**2 garlic cloves, lightly crushed**

**1 teaspoon fennel seeds**

**1** Rinse the olives under cold running water. Drain well and pat dry with paper towels.

**2** With a swivel-blade vegetable peeler, remove two 2-inch strips of the yellow zest of the lemon. Avoid digging into the white pith, or remove the pith with a knife.

**3** Combine all of the ingredients in a container and stir well. Cover and refrigerate, shaking the container occasionally, for 1 week. Serve at room temperature.

### Black Olives with Citrus *Olive Nere Condite*

MAKES 6 TO 8 SERVINGS

*Sometimes I add very thin slices of celery, fennel, or carrots to these olives and serve them as a salad with sandwiches. Use a swivel-blade vegetable peeler to remove just the thin colored portion of the citrus skin, known as the zest, without digging into the bitter white pith below the surface.*

**8 ounces Gaeta or other mild black olives**

**1 (1-inch strip) orange zest**

**1 (1-inch strip) lemon zest**

**1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil**

**2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**

**1 tablespoon coarsely chopped fresh marjoram  
or thyme**

**1 small dried chile or a pinch of crushed red pepper**

**1** Place the olives in a bowl. Stack the zests and cut them into very thin slivers with a large heavy chef's knife.

**2** Combine all of the ingredients in a container and stir well. Cover and refrigerate, shaking the container occasionally, for 1 week. Serve at room temperature.

## Spicy Olives in the Pan

### *Olive in Padella*

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

*For this easy appetizer, choose a mildly flavored olive that is not too salty, such as Gaeta.*

- 2 garlic cloves, lightly crushed**
- 1/4 cup olive oil**
- 8 ounces mild black olives**
- 1 fresh green chile, seeded and chopped, or 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper**
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano**
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, quartered**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

**1** In a small skillet, cook the garlic in the olive oil over medium heat, pressing it with the back of a wooden spoon until the garlic is lightly golden around the edges, about 2 minutes.

**2** Add the olives, chile, and oregano. Cook, stirring often, for 5 minutes.

**3** Stir in the tomatoes and cook 2 to 3 minutes more. Stir in the parsley. Let cool, then serve at room temperature.

## Roasted Olives

### *Olive al Forno*

MAKES 6 TO 8 SERVINGS

*Moist, meaty olives that are not too salty or strongly flavored are best for roasting. The oven heat concentrates their flavors, so look for olives that are mild to begin with. Serve these olives with bread to dip in the flavorful oil that surrounds them.*

- 8 ounces mild black olives, such as Gaeta or Alfonso**
- 4 ounces cured green olives, rinsed and drained**
- 6 garlic cloves, peeled**
- 1/2 lemon, thinly sliced**
- 1/3 cup olive oil**
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds**
- Pinch of crushed red pepper**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

**1** Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a small baking pan, stir together all of the ingredients. Bake 45 minutes, stirring 2 or 3 times.

**2** Transfer the olives to a bowl and serve warm.

## Zucchini Fritters

### *Frittelle di Zucchine*

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

*Little silver-dollar size pancakes of zucchini and herbs make a tasty appetizer, whether served warm or at room temperature. I also serve them with fish as a side dish.*

- 1 pound small zucchini or yellow squash, scrubbed and trimmed**
- 1 medium onion, trimmed and quartered**
- 2 large eggs, beaten**
- 1/2 cup unbleached all-purpose flour**
- 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano or mint**
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste**
- About 3 tablespoons olive oil**

**1** In a food processor or with the large holes of a box grater, grate the zucchini and onion into a bowl. Add in the remaining ingredients except for the oil and stir briefly to combine.

**2** In a large skillet, heat the oil over medium heat until a bit of the zucchini mixture sizzles when placed in the pan. Add the batter by tablespoonfuls, flattening it slightly to a 1/4-inch thickness. Cook 2 minutes or until browned around the edges. Turn the rounds with a slotted spatula and cook 2 minutes more or until browned.

**3** Drain on paper towels. Serve hot or at room temperature.

# Marinated Mushrooms

## *Funghi Marinati*

MAKES 1 QUART

*Marinated mushrooms are ideal for an antipasto platter, or use them in sandwiches or as a side dish with a frittata. This recipe comes from my aunt Loretta Balsamo. She is an excellent cook, and when she approves of one of my recipes, I know it is just right.*

**1 cup white vinegar**

**1 cup water**

**1½ pounds white mushrooms, halved or quartered if large**

**4 garlic cloves**

**1 teaspoon salt**

**½ teaspoon dried oregano**

**Pinch of crushed red pepper**

**Extra-virgin olive oil (optional)**

**1** In a large saucepan, bring the vinegar and water to a boil. Add the mushrooms and return the liquid to boiling. Cook 5 minutes. Drain the mushrooms, reserving the liquid.

**2** Place the mushrooms in a quart-size glass jar, pressing them down with the back of a spoon. Add the garlic, salt, oregano, and crushed red pepper. Add enough of the reserved liquid to cover the mushrooms. Let cool slightly, then cover and refrigerate at least 24 hours before serving.

**3** Serve the mushrooms drizzled with the oil, if desired. The mushrooms keep well in the refrigerator up to 2 weeks.

# Mushroom Pâté of the Two Sicilies

## *Pâté delle Due Sicilie*

MAKES 6 TO 8 SERVINGS

*In Jeanne Carola Francesconi's La Cucina Napoletana, this recipe is attributed to one of the highly regarded French-trained chefs who worked for aristocratic families in southern Italy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such a chef was known as a monzu, a corruption of the French monsieur.*

**2 tablespoons unsalted butter**

**12 ounces mushrooms, trimmed and sliced**

**½ teaspoon chopped fresh thyme**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**¼ cup dry Marsala**

**2 tablespoons black olive paste or chopped mild black olives, such as Gaeta**

**1 tablespoon capers, rinsed and drained**

**⅔ cup heavy cream**

**Toasted thin-sliced Italian or French bread**

**1** In a large skillet, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the mushrooms, thyme, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook, stirring frequently, until the mushrooms release their juices. Raise the heat and cook until the liquid has evaporated, about 10 minutes.

**2** Add the Marsala and simmer until evaporated. Stir in the olives and capers. Cook 5 minutes more. Stir in the cream and cook until evaporated. Let cool.

**3** Scrape the mixture into a food processor or blender. Process until smooth. Pack the mixture into a small bowl. Serve at room temperature with toasted or grilled bread.

## Veal-Stuffed Mushrooms

### *Funghi Ripieni di Vitello*

MAKES 8 TO 12 SERVINGS

*Mushrooms stuffed with ground meat, bread crumbs, vegetables, or cheese are a perfect addition to a hot antipasto assortment and also make a good side dish for roasts or steaks. White or button mushrooms with a 1- to 2-inch diameter cap are the right size for appetizers, since they can be eaten in one or two bites.*

**24 medium white mushrooms, lightly rinsed and patted dry**

**2 tablespoons unsalted butter**

**¼ cup shallots, peeled and finely chopped**

**½ teaspoon chopped fresh thyme**

**8 ounces ground veal**

**1 large egg**

**½ cup plain bread crumbs**

**¼ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano**

**2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

- 1** Place a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Oil a 13 × 9 × 2-inch baking pan.
- 2** Snap off the mushroom stems and chop them.
- 3** In a medium skillet, heat the butter over medium heat. Add the shallots and cook, stirring, until tender, about 4 minutes. Add the chopped mushroom stems and thyme. Cook until the mushrooms are tender and lightly browned, about 10 minutes.
- 4** In a large bowl, combine the meat, egg, bread crumbs, cheese, parsley, and salt and pepper. Mix in the cooked mushroom stem mixture. Fill the mushroom caps, mounding the stuffing slightly.
- 5** Place the mushrooms in the prepared pan. Bake for 30 minutes or until the mushroom caps are tender and the stuffing is browned. Serve warm.

## Mushrooms Stuffed with Mozzarella and Prosciutto

### *Funghi Ripieni*

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

*In Torino in Piedmont, I ate big mushroom caps filled with chopped mushrooms, prosciutto, and a creamy sauce. Here is a much simpler stuffed mushroom that has some of the same flavor characteristics from the creamy, fresh cheese and salty prosciutto. Serve one per person as a hot appetizer or cut them into quarters for guests to share.*

**4 large shiitake or portobello mushrooms, lightly rinsed and patted dry, stems removed**

**Olive oil**

**4 thin slices imported Italian prosciutto or cooked ham**

**4 slices fresh mozzarella**

**4 fresh basil leaves, torn**

- 1** Place a barbecue grill or broiler rack about 5 inches away from the heat source. Preheat the grill or broiler.
- 2** Brush the mushroom caps on both sides with olive oil. Broil with the top side up until slightly browned, about 5 minutes. Turn the caps and broil the other side until tender, about 3 minutes more.
- 3** Place a slice each of the prosciutto and cheese inside each cap, folding the pieces to fit. Broil 1 minute or until the cheese is slightly melted.
- 4** Sprinkle with basil and serve immediately.

# Peppers Piedmontese

## Peperoni Piemontese

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

*Piedmont is famous for excellent wines, sweet hazelnuts, and big bell peppers. Called quadrati because of their large, squarish shape, the peppers are quite a sight when piled high in a market stall as I first saw them in Asti, with their orange, green, red, and golden colors brilliant in the morning sun. Piedmontese cooks often pair bell peppers with garlic, capers, and anchovies for a sweet, salty, and sharp symphony of flavors.*

**4 large red or yellow peppers**  
**3 tablespoons olive oil**  
**8 anchovy fillets, chopped**  
**2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**  
**2 tablespoons chopped basil**  
**1 garlic clove, minced**  
**1 tablespoon capers**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**  
**2 tablespoons red wine vinegar**

- 1** Cut out the cores and seeds from the peppers. Cut peppers into 1/2-inch strips and trim away the white membranes.
- 2** Heat the oil over medium heat in a large skillet. Add the pepper strips and cook 20 to 25 minutes or until tender, stirring frequently.
- 3** Add the remaining ingredients. Raise the heat and cook, stirring occasionally, until most of the liquid evaporates. Let cool. Serve at room temperature.

# Roasted Pepper Rolls

## Involtini di Peperoni

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

*I had peppers prepared this way in Sorrento. The mozzarella there is made fresh daily from the milk of water buffaloes. The milk is exceptionally creamy and rich, and the cheese made from it is very tender, with a slight tanginess. It melts beautifully, so it is ideal for this dish. Fresh cow's milk mozzarella is very good, too, and widely available here, but try to avoid the hard, yellowish packaged mozzarella. It lacks the flavor and texture of the real thing.*

**4 large red or yellow bell peppers**  
**2 large ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped**  
**1/4 cup freshly grated Pecorino Romano**  
**2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil**  
**2 tablespoons olive oil**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**8 ounces fresh mozzarella**

- 1** Place a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 450°F. Cut the peppers in half lengthwise and cut away the cores, stems, and white membranes. Place the peppers cut side down on a roasting pan. Bake 25 minutes, or until the skins are wrinkled and the peppers are tender when pierced with a knife. Place the peppers in a bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let cool. Remove the skin.
- 2** When ready to bake the peppers, reheat the oven to 450°F. Oil a large baking dish.
- 3** Stir together the tomatoes, pecorino, basil, oil, salt, and pepper to taste. Set aside 1/2 cup. Stir the mozzarella into the remaining tomatoes.
- 4** Divide the mozzarella and tomato filling among the pepper halves. Fold over the ends to enclose the filling. Place the rolls in the prepared pan. Spoon on the reserved tomato mixture.
- 5** Bake for 15 minutes or until the cheese is melted. Serve hot.

# Tuna-Stuffed Peppers

## Peperoni Ripieni

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

*My mother used to make this recipe often, using whatever ingredients she had on hand. Sometimes the peppers were stuffed with tuna, sometimes with anchovies, and sometimes olives were added to the mix. Bread crumbs, salt, and pepper were about the only things that were constant. No matter; it always tasted great.*

- 2 large red bell peppers**
- 2 large yellow bell peppers**
- 1 (6½-ounce) can tuna packed in olive oil**
- 1 large tomato, finely chopped**
- ½ cup plain bread crumbs**
- 2 tablespoons capers, rinsed and chopped**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- ½ cup dry white wine**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**

- 1** Place a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Oil a 13 × 9 × 2-inch baking dish.
- 2** Cut the peppers lengthwise into quarters and remove the seeds, stems, and white membranes. Place the wedges cut side up in the pan.
- 3** Put the tuna and its oil in a bowl. Stir in the tomato, bread crumbs, capers, parsley, and salt and pepper to taste. Spoon the mixture into the peppers. Pour the wine around the peppers. Drizzle with the remaining oil.
- 4** Bake the peppers for 40 minutes or until tender. Serve at room temperature.

# Sweet-and-Sour Eggplant

## Caponata

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

*Caponata is one of the classic dishes of Sicilian cooking, and there are many variations, including one with seafood and another with raisins and pine*

*nuts. At Christmas time, many Sicilians make a special caponata with celery, almonds, capers, and olives. This recipe is caponata the way I like it, based on the variations I have tasted. Caponata tastes best if it is allowed to mellow at least a few hours or overnight. It keeps well in the refrigerator for several days but should be served at room temperature.*

- 2 medium eggplants, about 12 ounces each, cut into 1-inch dice**

### Salt

- 1 large onion, chopped**
- ¼ cup olive oil**
- 1½ cups tomato puree**
- 2 tender celery ribs, chopped**
- 1 cup chopped green olives**
- ¼ cup capers, rinsed and drained**
- 3 tablespoons sugar**
- ⅓ cup red wine vinegar**
- Vegetable oil for frying**
- 2 medium red bell peppers, cut into bite-size pieces**

- 1** Layer the eggplant pieces in a colander, sprinkling each layer with salt. Place the colander over a plate and let stand 1 hour.
- 2** In a large saucepan, cook the onion in the olive oil over medium heat until tender, about 5 minutes. Add the tomato, celery, olives, capers, sugar, and vinegar and stir well. Bring to a simmer and cook 15 minutes.
- 3** In a large heavy skillet, heat ½ inch of the vegetable oil over medium heat. Add a piece of pepper. If it sizzles rapidly, the oil is hot enough. Carefully add the remaining peppers. Cook until the peppers are tender and beginning to brown, about 10 minutes. Remove the peppers with a slotted spoon and add them to the tomato sauce.
- 4** Rinse the eggplant pieces and pat them dry with paper towels. Add more oil to the skillet if necessary. Fry the eggplant in batches until tender and browned, about 5 minutes. Transfer the eggplant to paper towels to drain.
- 5** Stir the eggplant into the tomato sauce and simmer 10 minutes. Serve at room temperature.

# Asparagus and Egg Salad

## *Insalata di Asparagi*

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

*Asparagus and eggs seem to have a special affinity for one another, perhaps because they are both at their best in the spring. I had this lovely salad in Bassano del Grappa, in the Veneto region, a town known for its outstanding white asparagus. To make them white and keep the flavor delicate, the asparagus are covered as they grow. As they require a lot more care than ordinary asparagus, they are considerably more expensive. Green asparagus can be used, if you prefer.*

**3 large eggs**

**1 pound asparagus (white preferred), trimmed**

**Salt**

**2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

**1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives**

**2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**

**1 to 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**1** Place the eggs in a medium saucepan with cold water to cover. Cover the pan and bring the water to a simmer. Cook 12 minutes. Drain and cool the eggs under running water.

**2** Bring about 2 inches of water to a boil in a large skillet. Add the asparagus and salt to taste. Cook until the asparagus are tender, about 5 to 8 minutes, according to the thickness of the spears. Cool the asparagus under cold running water. Drain and pat dry.

**3** Cut the asparagus and eggs into bite-size pieces. Place them in a medium bowl with the parsley and chives.

**4** In a small bowl, beat together the oil, lemon juice, and salt and pepper to taste. Pour the dressing over the asparagus and eggs in the bowl and gently toss. Serve immediately.

# Roasted Radicchio with Mozzarella and Anchovies

## *Radicchio al Forno con la Mozzarella*

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

*I find the bittersweet flavor of cooked radicchio very appealing, especially when paired with smooth, creamy mozzarella and salty anchovies. This is my version of a dish I have tasted often in Italian restaurants in the United States.*

**2 medium heads radicchio, trimmed**

**1/3 cup olive oil**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**8 ounces fresh mozzarella, cut into 16 slices**

**1 (2- to 3-ounce) jar anchovy fillets, drained**

**1** Place a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 425°F. Oil a 13 × 9 × 2-inch baking dish.

**2** Cut each radicchio head through the core into 8 wedges. Arrange the wedges in the baking dish. Brush the wedges with the oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bake the radicchio for 20 minutes or until tender when pierced with a knife and lightly browned. Remove the dish from the oven, but leave the oven on.

**3** Place a piece of mozzarella, an anchovy fillet, and a sprinkle of parsley on each wedge. Return the pan to the oven and bake 2 minutes more, or until the cheese begins to melt. Serve hot.

## 🌿 Egg Antipasti

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### Stuffed Eggs

#### *Uova Ripiene*

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

*When I was growing up, Easter dinner would always begin with an appetizer of stuffed hard-boiled eggs, salame from the local pork store, celery, and olives. It was my job to make the eggs. Here is one of my favorite ways to make them.*

**8 large eggs**

**Lettuce leaves**

**4 anchovy fillets, rinsed and chopped**

**1 tablespoon capers, rinsed and drained**

**1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

**2 tablespoons mayonnaise**

**1 tablespoon olive oil**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**Fresh parsley leaves, for garnish**

**1** Place the eggs in a medium saucepan with cold water to cover. Cover the pan and bring the water to a simmer. Cook 12 minutes. Drain and cool the eggs under running water.

**2** Line a plate with lettuce leaves. Peel the eggs and cut them in half lengthwise. Scoop out the yolks and place them in a bowl. Arrange the egg white halves on the bed of lettuce.

**3** In a medium bowl, mash the egg yolks with the anchovies, capers, parsley, mayonnaise, and olive oil until blended. Add salt and pepper to taste.

**4** Spoon the yolk mixture into the whites. Garnish with parsley leaves. Serve immediately.

### Tuna-Stuffed Eggs

#### *Uova Ripiene di Tonno*

MAKES 4 TO 8 SERVINGS

*Recipes are some of my favorite souvenirs of memorable dining experiences. Whenever I make these eggs, for example, I am reminded of the first time I ate them at Belvedere, a favorite restaurant in La Morra in Piedmont. The owner told me what was in them, and at home I experimented with the proportions of the ingredients to get the flavor I remembered.*

**4 large eggs**

**2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**

**1/4 cup drained oil-packed tuna, mashed**

**1 tablespoon grated Parmigiano-Reggiano**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**Lettuce leaves**

**Finely chopped fresh parsley, for garnish**

**1** Place the eggs in a medium saucepan with cold water to cover. Cover the pan and bring the water to a simmer. Cook 12 minutes. Drain and cool the eggs under running water.

**2** Peel the eggs in half lengthwise and remove the yolks. In a medium bowl, mash the yolks with the butter. Stir in the tuna, cheese, and salt and pepper to taste.

**2** Place the egg whites on a plate lined with lettuce leaves. Stuff the whites with the yolk mixture. Garnish with chopped parsley. Serve immediately.

## 🍷 Meat Antipasti

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### Figs and Melon with Prosciutto

#### *Fichi e Melone al Prosciutto*

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

*For summer, ripe figs and juicy wedges of melon with prosciutto are a classic antipasto. Either brown or green figs will do, and you can use honeydew, cantaloupe, or other sweet, ripe melon, except watermelon. Figs do not ripen after they are picked, so buy them when they are soft, with a drop of nectar visible in the opening at the flower end. If figs are not available, wedges of ripe pear, pineapple, or persimmon are good complements for the prosciutto.*

*Use the very best prosciutto for this simple antipasto, such as Prosciutto di Parma. Make sure the prosciutto is moist, not dried out, and that the slicer cuts the meat paper-thin and lays it out flat on wax paper. If stacked, the slices will stick together and be very hard to separate.*

**4 ripe fresh figs**

**8 (1-inch-thick) slices honeydew, cantaloupe,  
or other melon**

**12 thin slices imported Italian prosciutto**

With a small sharp knife, peel the figs. Arrange the figs and melon slices on serving plates. Drape the prosciutto on top. Serve immediately.

## Asparagus and Prosciutto Rolls

### *Involtini di Prosciutto e Asparagi*

MAKES 4 TO 8 SERVINGS

*Thin slices of tender prosciutto wrapped around asparagus spears make attractive appetizers. There are many variations on this theme. For example, substitute smoked salmon or salami for the prosciutto and breadsticks for the asparagus.*

**1 pound medium asparagus**

**Salt**

**1/4 pound thinly sliced imported Italian prosciutto**

**1** Snap or cut off the base of the asparagus where the color changes from green to white. In a large skillet, bring about 2 inches of water to a boil. Add salt to taste. Add the asparagus. Cook until an asparagus spear bends gently when lifted by the stem end, about 4 to 8 minutes, according to the thickness of the asparagus. They should be tender yet crisp. Drain the asparagus and cool under running water. Blot dry.

**2** Cut the prosciutto slices in half crosswise. Leaving the tips uncovered, wind a piece of prosciutto around the length of each asparagus spear. Arrange the asparagus on a serving platter.

**3** Serve immediately or cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate up to 3 hours.

# Roasted Figs in Prosciutto

## *Fichi in Prosciutto*

MAKES 4 TO 8 SERVINGS

*In Italy, fig trees grow everywhere. They are widely cultivated, of course, but you also find the trees growing randomly along the roadside, sprouting out of stone walls and even from cracks in the pavement.*

*Fresh figs are increasingly popular and available in the United States. They are good for dessert, but also with cheese or prosciutto for a first course. The Italians say the best figs have “a teardrop in the eye,” una lacrima nell’occhio, that is, a drop of juice oozing out of the flower end at the base of the fruit, which indicates that they are perfectly ripe.*

*If you don’t have a thick, rich, aged balsamico tradizionale, serve the figs plain. Any other kind just won’t do.*

**8 large fresh brown figs**

**8 slices of imported Italian prosciutto,  
halved crosswise**

**Best quality balsamic vinegar (optional)**

**1** Preheat the oven to 350°F. Cut the figs in half lengthwise. Wrap a piece of prosciutto completely around each fig half. Place the figs on a baking sheet. Bake 10 minutes or until heated through.

**3** Transfer the figs to a serving plate. Dribble each half with a drop or two of balsamic vinegar, if using. Serve immediately.

# Lemon Meatballs

## *Polpettine al Limone*

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

*Everybody loves when I make these tasty little meatballs, which I first ate on Capri. I usually make a double recipe, to be sure that everyone gets enough. They are also good served with a light, fresh tomato sauce.*

**½ cup dry crustless bread, cut into bite-size pieces**

**½ cup cold water**

**½ pound lean ground beef**

**¼ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano**

**2 tablespoons finely chopped pine nuts**

**2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**½ teaspoon grated lemon zest**

**1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice**

**1 large egg, beaten**

**3 tablespoons olive oil**

**Lemon wedges**

**1** Soak the bread in the water for 10 minutes. Squeeze out the excess liquid.

**2** In a large bowl, mix together all the ingredients except the oil and lemon wedges. Knead the mixture with clean hands until it is thoroughly blended.

**2** Rinse your hands in cool water. Form the meat mixture into 1-inch balls.

**3** Heat the oil in a large skillet. Add just enough of the meatballs as will fit comfortably without crowding. Cook, turning the balls occasionally, until browned on all sides, about 8 minutes.

**4** Serve hot with lemon wedges.

# Chicken and Olive Pâté

## *Pâté di Pollo*

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

*Game, pork, and veal are the typical meats used for pâté, but this easy Piedmontese version is appealing because it is made with chicken. It can be shaped in a bowl or mold and makes an attractive appearance on a buffet, garnished with pickled onions, cornichons, cherry tomatoes, or marinated sun-dried tomatoes.*

**1 medium onion, chopped**  
**1 medium carrot, chopped**  
**1 celery rib, chopped**  
**6 boneless, skinless chicken thighs**  
**Salt**  
**1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened**  
**1 teaspoon grated lemon zest**  
**1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg**  
**1 garlic clove, minced**  
**Freshly ground black pepper**  
**1/2 cup imported mild black olives, such as Gaeta, pitted and coarsely chopped**  
**Tender salad greens**  
**Toasted Italian or French bread**

**1** Place the onion, carrot, celery, and chicken in a large saucepan. Add cold water to cover and salt to taste. Bring to a simmer and cook until the chicken is tender, about 30 minutes. Let the chicken cool slightly in the broth.

**2** Transfer the chicken to a food processor fitted with a steel blade, or to a cutting board. Chop very finely. Transfer it to a large bowl and mix in the butter, lemon zest, nutmeg, garlic, and salt and pepper to taste. Stir in the chopped olives.

**3** Line a small bowl with plastic wrap. Add the chicken mixture and pack it in firmly. Cover and chill several hours or overnight.

**4** To serve, cut the pâté into 8 slices. Serve on a bed of salad greens with toasted bread.

## Seafood Antipasti

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# Scallops al Gratin

## *Capesante al Gratin*

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

*In Italy, scallops are sold live in their shells with the crescent-shaped, coral-colored roe still attached. The roe can be cooked along with the scallop, and the flavor is excellent. You may not have much luck outside Italy, though; most scallops sold in the United States have been removed from their shells, and the roe, which is highly perishable, is discarded so that the seafood will keep longer.*

*Large, reuseable scallop shells are sold in many kitchen equipment stores. The shells make pretty bake-and-serve dishes for these scallops, or for serving nuts, olives, or other small foods.*

**16 large sea scallops**  
**1 teaspoon chopped fresh tarragon**  
**1 teaspoon chopped fresh basil**  
**1 teaspoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**  
**2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**  
**2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**  
**2 tablespoons fine dry bread crumbs**  
**Lemon wedges**

**1** Preheat the broiler. Butter a small flame-proof baking dish or 4 scallop shells.

**2** Arrange the scallops in the dish or divide them among the shells. Sprinkle each of the herbs over them. In a small bowl, mix together the butter and lemon juice and season with a pinch of salt and some pepper. Pour the mixture over the scallops. Sprinkle them with the breadcrumbs.

**3** Place the scallops under the broiler for 2 to 3 minutes or until the crumbs are toasted and the scallops are just slightly opaque in the center. Serve hot, with lemon wedges.

# Baked Scallops with Marsala and Almonds

## *Capesante al Marsala*

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

*My husband and I ate scallops prepared this way at a popular trattoria in Venice. Baking them in individual scallop shells, available in cookware stores, offers a pretty presentation.*

**1 pound large sea scallops**  
**6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted**  
**2 tablespoon very finely chopped shallots**  
**2 tablespoons dry Marsala**  
**1 to 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**2 tablespoons sliced almonds**  
**Lemon wedges**

**1** Place a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Butter a 9-inch baking dish. Or, if using scallop shells, butter 4 shells, then place them on a baking sheet.

**2** Cut the scallops in half crosswise. Sprinkle them with salt and pepper and place them in the dish or shells.

**3** Melt the butter in a small skillet. Add the shallots and cook 2 minutes or until tender. Stir in the Marsala and bring to a simmer. Stir in the lemon juice, and salt and pepper to taste.

**4** Pour the butter mixture over the scallops. Scatter the almonds on top. Bake 12 minutes or until the scallops are opaque and the almonds are lightly browned. Serve immediately with lemon wedges.

# Seafood Salad

## *Insalata di Mare*

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

*When I was growing up, no Christmas Eve dinner in our house ever began without this Neapolitan-style seafood salad. Now I serve it all year round as a starter for a seafood dinner. Scallops, clams, and mussels can also be used in addition to or instead of the seafood listed below.*

**2 pounds octopus, thawed if frozen**  
**Salt**  
**1 pound cleaned calamari (squid)**  
**1 pound medium shrimp, shelled and deveined**  
**3 tender celery ribs, thinly sliced**  
**1/2 cup imported mild black olives, such as Gaeta, pitted and coarsely chopped**  
**1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil**  
**3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice, or to taste**  
**1/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley**  
**2 garlic cloves, minced**  
**1/2 teaspoon freshly grated lemon zest**  
**Pinch of crushed red pepper**  
**1 whole lemon, cut into wedges**

**1** In a large pot, bring 2 quarts of water to a simmer. Add the octopus and 1 tablespoon salt. Cook, covered, until the octopus is tender when pierced with a fork, 45 to 60 minutes. Drain the octopus and let cool slightly. Scrape away the loose skin. Cut the flesh into bite-size pieces.

**2** Cut the calamari bodies into 1-inch rings. Cut each set of tentacles in half lengthwise through the base.

**3** Bring a large saucepan of water to a boil. Add salt and the shrimp. Cook until the shrimp turn pink and are just cooked through, 2 to 3 minutes. Scoop out the shrimp and cool them under cold running water. Let the water return to a boil in the pot. Drain the shrimp well.

**4** Drop the calamari into the boiling water and cook until opaque, about 1 minute. Drain thoroughly and cool under running water.

**5** Cut the shrimp into bite-size pieces. Combine the seafood, celery, and olives on a large serving platter.

**6** Whisk together the oil, lemon juice, parsley, garlic, lemon zest, crushed red pepper, and salt to taste. Pour the dressing over the salad mixture and toss well. (If you are making the salad ahead of time, toss with only half of the dressing. Cover and refrigerate the salad up to 2 hours. Toss with the remaining dressing just before serving.) Taste for seasoning. Garnish with lemon wedges.

## Salt Cod Puree

### *Brandacujun or Baccala Mantecato*

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

*If you have never tried salt cod or stockfish before, start with this recipe. (For more information about these two types of fish, see page 264.) It makes an excellent appetizer or first course and is typically served with toasted bread or slices of grilled polenta.*

*Ligurians make it with stockfish and call it brandacujun, though a similar recipe made with salt cod in the Veneto is called baccala mantecato. In Liguria, the fish and potatoes are cooked together, then shaken vigorously in their pot until they form a slightly chunky puree. Venetians whip the cooked fish with olive oil using only a wooden spoon. I prefer to puree the fish in a mixer or food processor, then blend in the mashed potatoes by hand so they stay light and fluffy.*

*Leftovers can be reheated in a bowl set over simmering water (or a double boiler), or you can shape it into small patties, roll them in egg and bread crumbs, and fry them in oil.*

**1 pound soaked boneless salt cod or stockfish**  
(see page 265)

**3 medium potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks**

**2 garlic cloves, peeled**

**Salt**

**1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil**

**1/4 cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

**Toasted Italian or French bread**

**1** Prepare the fish, if necessary. Then bring 2 quarts of water to a simmer. Add the fish and cover the pan. Cook 20 to 30 minutes or until the fish is very tender. Remove the fish with a slotted spoon and place it on a plate.

**2** Place the potatoes, garlic, and salt to taste in a medium saucepan with cold water to cover. Cover and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Cook until the potatoes are very tender when pierced with a knife. Drain the potatoes, reserving the cooking water.

**3** With a small knife and your fingers, remove and discard any bones and skin from the fish. Place the fish in a food processor or heavy duty mixer and beat until very smooth.

**4** Mash the potatoes and garlic with a ricer or in a food mill or potato masher.

**5** In a large bowl, combine the fish and potatoes. Beat in the oil and salt to taste. Add some of the potato water and beat until light and fluffy. Stir in the parsley.

**6** Scrape the mixture into a serving bowl and drizzle with additional oil. Serve warm with toast.

## 🌿 Dips and Spreads

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### Olive Oil Dip

#### *Pinzimonio*

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

*The custom of using olive oil as a dip for bread at mealtimes is an American invention, not an Italian one (even though now you occasionally may see it in Italy, too). However, Italians do serve full-flavored extra-virgin olive oil with an assortment of fresh vegetables as an appetizer. They call it pinzimonio, from the word for pincers—what your fingers resemble as they dip a piece of vegetable in the oil. In Italy, you can even buy special pinzimonio serving dishes consisting of a large bowl for the vegetables and smaller bowls for individual servings of oil.*

**1 cup extra-virgin olive oil**

**Fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**Assorted raw vegetables cut into strips, such as carrots, celery, green onions, peppers, zucchini, radishes**

Divide the olive oil among four small cups. Each diner should add salt and pepper to taste. Serve with the raw vegetables.

### Poor Man's Caviar

#### *Caviale di Povero Uomo*

MAKES 1 CUP

*I first sampled this tasty olive spread in Bergamo, on crisp slices of fried polenta. It is also good on toasted bread or sticks of raw vegetables.*

**1 garlic clove**

**2 anchovy fillets**

**1 cup chopped pitted imported black olives**

**2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

**Extra-virgin olive oil**

In a food processor or blender, finely chop the garlic and anchovies. Add the olives and chop them coarsely. Blend in the parsley and enough oil to moisten the mixture. Serve.

### Sun-Dried Tomato Spread

#### *Salsa di Pomodori Secchi*

MAKES 1 CUP

*Serve this spread with toasted bread or bread sticks, or try spooning it over a soft cheese, such as robiola, a mild creamy cheese from Piedmont, or goat cheese.*

**1 cup sun-dried tomato halves**

**1 garlic clove**

**1 tablespoon capers**

**2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**

**1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar**

**Salt**

**1** Place the tomato halves in a medium bowl with warm water to cover. Let stand 10 minutes. Drain and pat dry.

**2** In a food processor or blender, combine the tomatoes, garlic, and capers and process until chopped fine. Stir in the oil, vinegar, and a little salt. Taste and adjust seasoning.

**3** Scrape the mixture into a bowl. Cover and let stand 1 hour before serving.

### Piedmontese Hot Bath

#### *Bagna Cauda*

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

*In Piedmont, this butter-oil “hot bath” flavored with anchovies and garlic is served as a dip for fresh vegetables and chunks of good bread. Use a chafing dish or fondue pot to keep the sauce warm. Be sure to provide small plates and plenty of napkins, as the sauce is drippy.*

**1/2 cup unsalted butter**

**1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil**

**6 garlic cloves, finely chopped**

**2 (2-ounce) cans anchovy fillets with their oil**

**Assorted cooked and raw vegetables, cut up, such as carrots, peppers, green onions, celery, broccoli, cauliflower, and potatoes**

**Italian or French bread, cut into bite-size pieces**

**1** In a small saucepan, combine the butter, oil, garlic, and anchovies. Cook over medium heat for 5 minutes, mashing the anchovies with a wooden spoon.

**2** Pour the sauce into a small chafing dish or fondue pot set over a warming device. Serve with the vegetables and bread.

## Tuna Spread

### *Salsa Tonnata*

MAKES 1 1/2 CUPS

*Everyone needs reliable recipes that can be put together in a flash. This tuna dip is high on my list. I always have the ingredients in the pantry, and it's a true crowd pleaser. The sauce is also good on hard-cooked eggs, asparagus, cherry tomatoes, or toast. Tuna packed in oil is important here for best flavor and texture.*

- 1 (6 1/2-ounce) can tuna packed in olive oil**
- 4 anchovy fillets**
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise**
- 2 tablespoons capers, drained**
- 1 small garlic clove, peeled**
- 1/2 teaspoon grated lemon zest**
- 1 1/2 to 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**
- Belgian endive leaves, carrot or celery sticks, or other raw vegetables**

**1** In a food processor or blender, combine the tuna with its oil, anchovies, mayonnaise, capers, garlic, and lemon zest. Process until smooth, about 3 minutes, stopping to scrape the mixture down as necessary. Add lemon juice to taste.

**2** Scrape the tuna mixture into a small bowl. Serve with the vegetables.

## Eggplant Caviar

### *Caviale di Melanzana*

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

*Many dips for vegetables or toasts are made with butter, mayonnaise, or other high-fat ingredients. This dip gets its creamy texture from roasted eggplant and good flavor from the mushroom, pine nuts, and garlic with just a small amount of extra-virgin olive oil.*

- 1 large portobello mushroom, wiped or lightly rinsed and stemmed**
- 1 large eggplant, about 1 pound**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**
- 2 tablespoons toasted pine nuts**
- 1 small garlic clove, minced**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- Toasted Italian or French bread or raw vegetables**

**1** Place a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 450°F. Line a small baking pan with foil.

**2** Brush the mushroom lightly with oil. Place the mushroom and the eggplant in the pan. Pierce the eggplant skin in several places with a fork. Bake 20 minutes or until the mushroom is tender when pierced with a fork. Remove the mushroom. Turn the eggplant and cook 20 minutes more or until tender when pierced with a knife.

**3** Remove the eggplant from the oven. Let cool a little, then remove the eggplant stem and cut the eggplant in half lengthwise. Place it in a colander to drain and cool completely.

**4** Scoop out the eggplant flesh and discard the skin. Chop the eggplant and mushroom and place them in a large bowl. Stir in the parsley, pine nuts, garlic, oil, and salt and pepper to taste.

**5** Scrape the mixture into a serving bowl. Serve with toasted bread or raw vegetables.

## 🍷 Bruschetta and Crostini

### Garlic Bruschetta

#### *Bruschetta*

MAKES 8

*In the Castelli Romani district outside of Rome, I was served thick slices of crusty bread, toasted and rubbed with fresh garlic cloves and dripping with rich green extra-virgin olive oil. Little chunks of young grana cheese accompanied it, and we washed it down with a fruity local wine. It was so simple, yet so perfect; it was a meal I will never forget.*

*In Umbria and Tuscany, this antipasto originated as a way to sample freshly pressed olive oil. The pressing is typically done in autumn when it is quite chilly. While the olive growers waited for their freshly picked olives to be pressed, they would toast some bread and drizzle it with the oil directly from the mill. The warmth of the bread brings out the essence of the oil. The garlic is optional, especially when the oil is really fine.*

**8 (1/2-inch-thick) slices chewy Italian bread**

**4 large garlic cloves, peeled**

**Extra-virgin olive oil**

**Fine sea salt or kosher salt (optional)**

**1** Place a barbecue grill or broiler rack about 5 inches away from the heat source. Preheat the grill or broiler. Toast the bread on one side until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Turn the bread and toast the other side, about 2 minutes.

**2** Immediately rub the bread with a garlic clove. Drizzle generously with oil. Sprinkle with salt, if desired. Serve immediately.

### *Bruschetta and Crostini*

*Bruschetta* and *crostini* are slices of toasted Italian bread served with a topping. Though the two words are sometimes used interchangeably, *bruschetta*, from *bruscare*, “to toast,” usually applies to the simplest form—a generous slice of chewy bread toasted or, better yet, grilled over a fire, rubbed with garlic and drizzled with extra-virgin olive oil. When tomatoes are ripe, *bruschetta* is often topped with a chopped tomato salad.

*Crostini*, meaning “little crusts,” usually have more complex toppings, which can be anything from a cooked vegetable to liver pâté to cheese spreads.

The most important ingredient for *bruschetta* and *crostini* is the bread. It should be crusty and chewy and firm enough so that it will not collapse under the weight of the topping. The bread is typically toasted under a broiler, on a grill, or on top of the stove in a grill pan or *tostapane*, a thin, perforated metal sheet topped with a rack for making toast. The device is sold in many Italian kitchenware stores. The bread quickly browns on the surface, yet the inside of the slice stays soft and does not dry out as it would if toasted in an electric toaster. Day-old bread is fine and sometimes preferable if the bread is not as chewy as it should be.

*Crostini* and *bruschetta* taste best when they are freshly made, though many of the toppings can be made ahead and kept warm, then applied to the bread just before serving.

Many other recipes in this book can be used to top *crostini*, such as caponata (Sweet-and-Sour Eggplant, page 16), peperonata (Sweet Peppers with Tomatoes and Onions, page 449), or Mushroom Pâté (see page 13).

# Tomato Bruschetta

## *Bruschetta di Pomodori*

MAKES 8

*Toasted country bread topped with tomatoes has become so popular it is almost a cliché. But when it is made properly with good, chewy bread and ripe tomatoes in season, there really is nothing better. Save this one for the summer tomato season. Here is the basic formula, plus some variations.*

**2 to 3 medium ripe tomatoes**

**3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**

**3 fresh basil leaves or 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**8 1/2-inch slices Italian bread**

**1 garlic clove**

**1** Cut the tomatoes in half through the stem end. Cut away the cores. Squeeze out the seeds and juice. Chop the tomatoes into 1/2-inch pieces.

**2** In a medium bowl toss the tomatoes with the oil and salt and pepper to taste. If using fresh basil, stack the leaves and cut them crosswise into thin ribbons. Add the basil or the oregano to the tomatoes and stir well.

**3** Place a barbecue grill or broiler rack about 5 inches away from the heat source. Preheat the grill or broiler.

**4** Toast the bread on one side until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Turn the bread and toast the other side, about 2 minutes. Rub it on one side with the garlic clove. Pile on the tomatoes and serve immediately.

## *Ten Ways to Vary Tomato Bruschetta*

- 1** Add finely minced garlic or red or green onion.
- 2** Add parsley, mint, or thyme instead of basil.
- 3** Add chopped fresh arugula or watercress.
- 4** Add diced mozzarella or ricotta salata cheese.
- 5** Add pitted chopped black or green olives or capers.
- 6** Top with a slice of mozzarella and run the toasts under the broiler.
- 7** Top with one or two anchovy fillets.
- 8** Drizzle with balsamic vinegar.
- 9** Add olive oil-packed tuna.
- 10** Top with shavings of Parmigiano-Reggiano.

# Tomato and Avocado Bruschetta

## *Bruschetta di Pomodori e Avocado*

MAKES 8

*Avocados are not common in Italy. But because they go so well with tomatoes and good olive oil, I often use them as a topping for bruschetta.*

- 2 medium ripe tomatoes**
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 tablespoon chopped red onion**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1/2 medium ripe Hass avocado, diced**
- 1 to 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**
- 4 to 8 (1/2-inch-thick) slices Italian bread**

**1** Cut the tomato in half through the stem end. Cut away the core. Squeeze out the seeds and juice. Chop the tomato into 1/2-inch pieces.

**2** In a medium bowl toss the tomatoes with the oil, onion, and salt and pepper to taste. Stir in the avocado and lemon juice.

**3** Place a barbecue grill or broiler rack about 5 inches away from the heat source. Preheat the grill or broiler.

**4** Toast the bread on one side until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Turn the bread and toast the other side, about 2 minutes. Top with the tomato mixture. Serve immediately.

# Beans and Greens Toasts

## *Crostini di Fagioli e Verdura*

MAKES 8

*Creamy beans are often served with cooked greens such as broccoli rabe, chicory, or escarole in southern Italy. Often, the beans and greens are served over bread. I adapted the combination for these crostini, which should be eaten with a knife and fork.*

- 5 tablespoons olive oil**
- 2 large garlic cloves, peeled and chopped fine**
- 1 small dried chile (peperoncino preferred), crushed, or a pinch of crushed red pepper flakes**
- 1 pound broccoli rabe, chicory, or escarole, washed, trimmed, and cut into bite-size pieces**
- 1/4 cup water**
- Salt to taste**
- 2 cups cooked dried or canned cranberry or cannellini beans, drained**
- 8 (1/2-inch-thick) slices Italian bread, toasted**

**1** In a large saucepan, put 3 tablespoons of the oil, half the garlic, and all of the red pepper. Cook over medium heat until sizzling, about 1 minute.

**2** Add the greens, 1/4 cup water, and salt to taste. Cover and lower the heat. Cook until the greens are tender, about 10 minutes for broccoli rabe or dandelion greens and 5 minutes for spinach.

**3** Meanwhile, in a medium saucepan, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons oil and garlic 1 minute. Stir in the beans, cover, and cook over low heat until heated through, about 4 minutes. Coarsely mash the beans. Season to taste.

**4** Place a barbecue grill or broiler rack about 5 inches away from the heat source. Preheat the grill or broiler.

**5** Toast the bread on one side until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Turn the bread and toast the other side, about 2 minutes. Spread the toast with the beans. Top with the greens and a spoonful of their cooking liquid. Serve immediately.

# Chicken Liver Toasts

## *Crostini di Fegato di Pollo*

MAKES 8

*Tuscan cooks serve these crostini accompanied by slices of locally made salumi (cured meat), made with pork or wild boar. One of my favorites is finocchiona, salame made with ground pork and fennel seeds.*

**8 chicken livers**

**3 tablespoons olive oil**

**1 medium red onion, sliced and separated into rings**

**2 sage leaves, chopped**

**1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**8 (1/2-inch-thick) slices Italian bread, toasted**

**1** Trim the chicken livers, cutting away the connecting fibers with a sharp knife. Cut each liver into 2 or 3 pieces. Rinse the livers and pat dry.

**2** Pour the oil into a medium skillet. Add the onion and sage leaves and cook over medium heat until softened, about 5 minutes.

**3** Add the chicken livers and cook, mashing the livers with the back of a spoon, until just slightly pink, about 2 minutes. Add the vinegar and salt and pepper to taste.

**4** Place a barbecue grill or broiler rack about 5 inches away from the heat source. Preheat the grill or broiler. Toast the bread on one side until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Turn the bread and toast the other side, about 2 minutes.

**5** Top the bread with the liver mixture. Serve immediately.

# Zucchini and Cheese Toasts

## *Crostini di Zucchine*

MAKES 8

*Crostini and bruschetta are favorite appetizers at Roman wine bars. For lunch one day, I had an assortment of hot crostini including this one topped with zucchini and melted Fontina Valle d'Aosta, a flavorful cow's milk cheese. Substitute swiss, Asiago, or another semifirm cheese if Fontina Valle d'Aosta is not available.*

**4 small zucchini (about 1 pound), scrubbed**

**4 tablespoons olive oil**

**1 garlic clove, minced**

**1 tablespoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

**1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil**

**1/2 teaspoon dried oregano**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

**8 (1/2-inch-thick) slices Italian bread**

**2 ounces Fontina Valle d'Aosta or swiss cheese, cut into thin slices**

**1** Trim the ends from the zucchini and cut into 1/4-inch sticks, 2 inches in length. Pat the sticks dry with paper towels.

**2** Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the zucchini and cook, stirring occasionally, until lightly browned, about 10 minutes.

**3** Stir in the garlic, all the herbs, and the salt and pepper. Cook 2 minutes more.

**4** Place a barbecue grill or broiler rack about 5 inches away from the heat source. Preheat the grill or broiler. Toast the bread on one side until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Turn the bread and toast the other side, about 2 minutes. Remove the toast but leave the oven turned on.

**5** Place the toast on a baking sheet. Pile the zucchini on the toast and top with the cheese. Run the crostini under the broiler for 2 minutes or until the cheese is melted. Serve immediately.

# Chickpea Toasts

## *Crostini di Ceci*

MAKES 8

*Chickpeas, sometimes called garbanzo beans, take a long time to cook from the dried state, so I usually buy them in cans. They are good with pasta, in soups, or coarsely mashed as a topping for crostini. This recipe is my version of the crostini I tasted at Babbo restaurant in New York.*

- 1/2 cup chopped shallots or onions**
- 1/2 teaspoon snipped fresh rosemary leaves**
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling**
- 1 (16-ounce) can chickpeas, drained**
- 2 tablespoons water**
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**
- 8 slices Italian bread, about 1/2-inch thick**

**1** In a small saucepan, combine the shallots, rosemary, and the 2 tablespoons of oil over medium-low heat. Cook 2 to 3 minutes or until the shallots are tender.

**2** Add the chickpeas, water, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook 3 to 4 minutes more or until heated through, stirring frequently and coarsely mashing the chickpeas with the back of a spoon. Add a little more water if the mixture seems dry. Stir in the vinegar and taste for seasoning.

**3** Place a barbecue grill or broiler rack about 5 inches away from the heat source. Preheat the grill or broiler. Toast the bread on one side until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Turn the bread and toast the other side, about 2 minutes.

**4** Spread with the chickpea mixture. Drizzle with additional oil and serve immediately.

# Broccoli Toasts

## *Crostini con Crema di Broccoli*

MAKES 8

*Roman broccoli, known as broccoli romanesco, is pale green with a beautiful shape that resembles an exotic seashell. I can find it in the fall at my local farmers' market and occasionally at gourmet groceries. The flavor is more delicate than dark green broccoli, more like a cross between broccoli and cauliflower. Ordinary broccoli works fine for this recipe. The cooked vegetable is pureed with garlic and olive oil and makes a delicious spread for crostini.*

- 1 pound broccoli**
- Salt**
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 whole garlic clove**
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- 8 (1/2-inch-thick) slices Italian bread**

**1** Trim the broccoli, reserving some of the stems. Bring a large saucepan of water to boiling. Add the broccoli and salt to taste. Cook until the broccoli is tender, about 10 minutes. Drain well, reserving some of the water.

**2** Transfer the broccoli to a food processor. Add the garlic and process until chopped fine. With the motor running, add the oil through the tube and process until smooth and spreadable. Add a tablespoon or two of the broccoli water if the mixture is too thick. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

**3** Place a barbecue grill or broiler rack about 5 inches away from the heat source. Preheat the grill or broiler. Toast the bread on one side until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Turn the bread and toast the other side, about 2 minutes. Spread with the warm broccoli puree. Serve immediately.

# Eggplant and Tomato Toasts

## *Crostini alla Melanzane*

MAKES 8

*Eggplant, tomato, garlic, and cheese are a classic flavor combination throughout southern Italy—think of eggplant parmesan or the Sicilian pasta alla Norma. Here the same flavors team up as a topping for crostini.*

- 1 medium eggplant, about 12 ounces**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**
- 2 or 3 large garlic cloves**
- 1 large ripe tomato, cored and chopped**
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh basil**
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 8 (1/2-inch-thick) slices Italian bread**
- 1/2 cup (about 3 ounces) ricotta salata cheese, crumbled**

**1** Place a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 375° F. Place the eggplant on a baking sheet and pierce the skin with a fork two or three times to allow steam to escape. Bake 60 minutes or until soft. Let cool slightly.

**2** Remove the eggplant from the oven. Let cool a little, then remove the eggplant stem and cut the eggplant in half lengthwise. Place it in a colander to drain and cool completely.

**3** Scoop out the eggplant flesh and discard the skin. Mash it to a paste with a fork or masher or puree it in a food processor. Add salt and pepper to taste.

**4** Combine the tomato with the basil and oil, and add a little salt and pepper.

**5** Place a barbecue grill or broiler rack about 5 inches away from the heat source. Preheat the grill or broiler. Toast the bread on one side until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Turn the bread and toast the other side, about 2 minutes. Rub the slices with the garlic. Spread the toast with the eggplant puree. Top with the chopped tomato mixture and the ricotta salata. Serve immediately.

## *Ten Quick Crostini*

- 1** Robiola or other soft cheese and slivers of sun-dried tomato
- 2** Chopped marinated sun-dried tomatoes and smoked mozzarella
- 3** Sweet butter, chives, and smoked salmon
- 4** Mascarpone and smoked salmon
- 5** Mashed ripe figs and a slice of prosciutto
- 6** Mashed gorgonzola cheese and toasted walnuts
- 7** Black olive paste and mozzarella—run under the broiler
- 8** Fresh mozzarella and anchovies—run under the broiler
- 9** Tomato sauce, mozzarella slices—run under the broiler
- 10** Sautéed mushrooms, fontina cheese—run under the broiler



## Fried Antipasti

### “Little Orange” Rice Balls

#### Arancine

MAKES 18

*Golden fried rice balls are a classic Sicilian snack. The Italian name—arancine—comes from their resemblance to oranges. Two versions are popular: one with the meat ragu filling that follows and the other with ham and béchamel.*

#### FILLING

- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- ½ cup very finely chopped onion**
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped**
- 8 ounces ground beef chuck**
- 1½ cups chopped canned Italian peeled tomatoes**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- ½ cup fresh or frozen peas**

#### RICE

- 5 cups chicken broth**
- ½ teaspoon saffron threads, crumbled**
- 2 cups (1 pound) medium-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano**
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- Salt to taste**
- 4 large egg yolks**
- ½ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano plus ½ cup grated Pecorino Romano**

#### TO ASSEMBLE

- 5 large egg whites**
- 2 cups plain dry bread crumbs**
- 1 cup all-purpose flour**
- 4 ounces imported provolone, cut into small dice**
- Vegetable oil for frying**

**1** To make the filling, put the oil, onion, and garlic in a medium skillet. Turn on the heat to medium and cook until the onion is soft, about 5 minutes.

**2** Add the beef to the skillet and cook, stirring to break up the lumps, until lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes, and salt and pepper to taste. Bring the sauce to a simmer and reduce the heat to low. Cook, stirring occasionally, until thick, about 30 minutes.

**3** Add the peas and cook 5 minutes more. Let cool.

**4** Bring the broth and the saffron to a boil in a large pot. Stir in the rice, butter, and salt. Cover and reduce the heat to low. Cook about 18 minutes, or until the rice is tender.

**5** Remove the rice from the heat. Let cool slightly, then stir in the egg yolks and grated cheese.

**6** To assemble, beat the egg whites in a shallow plate until foamy. Spread the bread crumbs on one sheet of wax paper and the flour on another. Place a cake rack over a baking sheet.

**7** Dip your hands in cool water to prevent the rice from sticking. Scoop up about ⅓ cup of the rice mixture and place it in the palm of one hand. Poke a shallow hole in the center of the rice. Press a scant tablespoon of the meat sauce into the hole and top it with a piece of provolone. Cup your hand slightly, molding the rice over the filling to enclose it completely. Add a little more rice if necessary to cover the filling completely. Very gently squeeze the rice to compact it and form a ball.

**8** Carefully roll the rice ball in the flour, then in the egg whites to coat it completely. Roll the ball in the bread crumbs, being sure not to leave any spots uncovered. Place the rice ball on a rack to dry.

**9** Continue making rice balls with the remaining ingredients. Let the rice balls dry on the rack for 30 minutes.

**10** Line a tray with paper towels; set the oven at the lowest temperature. Pour about 3 inches of oil into an electric deep fryer or a deep heavy saucepan. Heat the oil until the temperature reaches 375°F on a deep-frying thermometer or when a drop of egg white sizzles when it is added to the oil.

**11** Carefully place the rice balls a few at a time in the hot oil. Do not crowd the pan. Cook until golden brown and crisp all over, 3 to 4 minutes. With a slotted spoon or strainer, transfer the rice balls to the paper towels to drain. Repeat with the remaining rice balls. Keep the cooked rice balls in the warm oven while you fry the remainder. Serve hot or warm.

## “Telephone-Wire” Rice Balls

### *Suppli’ di Riso*

MAKES 24

*Romans make rice balls filled with cheese. When you pull the rice ball apart, the melted cheese in the center stretches into strings like telephone wires, which gives the rice balls their name. Suppli’ are served all over Rome; Italians love to stop in after school or work to have a suppli’ snack before dinner.*

**5 cups chicken broth**

**2 cups medium-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano**

**4 tablespoons unsalted butter**

**Salt to taste**

**3 large eggs, beaten**

**1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano**

**2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

**Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg**

**6 ounces mozzarella, cut into small dice**

### TO ASSEMBLE

**3 large eggs, beaten**

**2 cups plain dried bread crumbs**

**1 cup all-purpose flour**

**Vegetable oil for frying**

**1** Bring the broth to a boil in a large pot. Stir in the rice, butter, and salt. Cover and reduce the heat to low. Cook until the rice is tender, about 18 minutes.

**2** Remove the rice from the heat. Let cool slightly, then stir in the three beaten eggs, grated cheese, parsley, and nutmeg.

**3** To assemble, beat the other three eggs in a shallow plate until foamy. Spread the bread crumbs on one sheet of wax paper and the flour on another. Place a cake rack over a baking sheet.

**4** Dip your hands in cool water to prevent the rice from sticking. Scoop up about  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of the rice mixture and place it in the palm of one hand. Poke a shallow hole in the center of the rice. Press a bit of the mozzarella in the hole. Cup your hand slightly, molding the rice over the filling to enclose it completely. Add a little more rice if necessary to cover the filling completely. Very gently squeeze the rice to compact it and form a ball.

**5** Carefully roll the rice ball in the flour, then in the eggs to coat it completely. Roll the ball in the bread crumbs, being sure not to leave any spots uncovered. Place the rice ball on a rack to dry.

**6** Continue making rice balls with the remaining ingredients. Let the rice balls dry on the rack for 30 minutes.

**7** Line a tray with paper towels; set the oven at the lowest temperature. Pour about 3 inches of oil into an electric deep fryer or a deep heavy saucepan. Heat the oil until the temperature reaches 375°F on a deep-frying thermometer or when a drop of egg white sizzles when it is added to the oil.

**8** Carefully place the rice balls a few at a time in the hot oil. Do not crowd the pan. Cook until golden brown and crisp all over, 3 to 4 minutes. With a slotted spoon or strainer, transfer the rice balls to the paper towels to drain. Repeat with the remaining rice balls. Keep the cooked rice balls in the warm oven while you fry the remainder. Serve hot or warm.

# Sicilian Chickpea Flour Fritters

## Panelle

MAKES 4 TO 6 SERVINGS

*Chickpea flour (see shopping sources on page 626) is available in many Italian and Middle Eastern markets and natural foods stores. Some stores offer a choice of roasted and unroasted chickpea flour. The latter is closer to the Italian kind.*

*In Palermo, these panelle are served as an appetizer, often accompanied by some caponata (see Sweet-and-Sour Eggplant, page 16), or they are piled up in a sesame seed roll, topped with ricotta and grated pecorino and eaten as a sandwich.*

**1¾ cups cold water**

**1 cup chickpea flour**

**1 teaspoon salt**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**Vegetable or peanut oil for frying**

**1** Pour the water into a medium saucepan. Slowly whisk the chickpea flour into the water. Stir in the salt.

**2** Place the saucepan over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture comes to a simmer. Reduce the heat to low and cook, stirring constantly, until very thick, about 5 minutes.

**3** Pour the mixture onto a baking sheet. With a spatula, spread it evenly to about a ¼-inch thickness. Let cool one hour or until firm. For longer storage, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate.

**4** Just before serving, heat about 1 inch of the oil in a deep heavy saucepan. Line a tray with paper towels. Cut the dough into 2-inch squares. To test if the oil is hot enough, drop a small piece of the

dough into the oil. The oil should sizzle rapidly. Add enough of the dough as will fit without crowding. Fry the pieces, turning once, until puffed and golden brown, about 4 minutes. Transfer the fritters with a slotted spoon to the paper towels to drain. Keep warm while frying the remainder.

**5** Sprinkle with salt and pepper and serve hot.

# Basil Fritters

## Foglie di Basilico Fritte

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

*Basil leaves in a crisp batter are irresistible appetizers. Try sage and parsley, too.*

**½ cup all-purpose flour**

**¼ cup cornstarch**

**1 teaspoon salt**

**About ½ cup club soda or sparkling mineral water**

**Vegetable oil**

**24 large basil leaves**

**1** In a small bowl, whisk together the flour, cornstarch, and salt. Stir in enough of the club soda to make a thick, smooth batter. Let stand 1 hour.

**2** Pour the oil to a ½-inch depth in a small heavy saucepan. Heat over medium heat until a small drop of the batter sizzles and swims around the pan when added to the hot oil.

**3** Line a tray with paper towels. Wipe the basil leaves with a damp paper towel. Dip the leaves in the batter. Remove the leaves a few at a time and slip them into the hot oil. Fry 2 minutes or until golden on both sides. Transfer to the paper towels to drain.

**4** Fry the remaining leaves in the same way. Serve hot.

# Fried Sage Leaves

## *Salvia Fritta*

MAKES 4 TO 6 SERVINGS

*At a large banquet organized by the restaurateurs' association of the Marches region, these crisp fried sage leaves were passed as an accompaniment to prosecco, a dry sparkling wine. The leaves are as addictive as potato chips.*

**1/3 cup fine dry bread crumbs**

**24 large fresh sage leaves**

**2 tablespoons all-purpose flour**

**Salt**

**1 large egg yolk, beaten**

**2 tablespoons olive oil**

**1 tablespoon unsalted butter**

**Lemon wedges**

**1** Spread the bread crumbs on a sheet of wax paper. In a small bowl, toss the sage leaves with the flour and 1 teaspoon salt.

**2** One at a time, dip the sage leaves in the egg yolk, then roll them in the bread crumbs. Place the leaves on a cake rack to dry 30 minutes.

**3** Line a tray with paper towels. Just before serving, heat the oil and butter in a small skillet. When the butter foam subsides, arrange the sage leaves in the pan in a single layer. Fry, turning the leaves once, until browned and crisp on both sides, about 4 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain. Sprinkle with salt and serve hot with lemon wedges.

