



Celebrate the Holidays with *Lidia*

This year, the holidays have new meaning as we re-examine priorities and celebrate life's simple blessings. What better way to do so than with simple, hearty Italian meals from renowned chef Lidia Matticchio Bastianich? Here the 2009 NIAF Honoree shares some of her favorite recipes for informal holiday meals.

For more of Lidia's recipes, visit LidiasItaly.com, watch her PBS cooking show "Lidia's Italy" or purchase her new book, "Lidia Cooks From the Heart of Italy."



Crostino con Lenticchie/ Lentil Crostini

Serves 6

This savory, thick lentil spread is a great topping for a crostino, especially when made with tiny, firm lenticchie di Castelluccio, which give your mouth the feeling of caviar. It can also serve as a side dish for any grilled meat, or as the base for risotto or soup. Then again, with the addition of crumbled sausage, it would make a great pasta sauce. So get creative: make a double batch of the lentil topping here and have fun with all the leftovers.

Ingredients:

- 1 Cup small lentils, preferably lenticchie di Castelluccio
- 2 Medium stalks celery, with leaves, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
- 2 Bay Leaves, preferably fresh
- 6 Tablespoons Extra Virgin Olive Oil, plus more for drizzling
- 2 Plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- 1 Cup chopped onion
- ¼ Teaspoon peperoncino flakes or to taste
- 2 Cups canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- 2 Teaspoons kosher salt
- 12 Slices Italian bread

Recommended equipment:

- A heavy-bottomed saucepan, 3- to 4- quart capacity, with a cover
- A large heavy skillet or sauté pan

Directions:

- Rinse the lentils, and put them in the saucepan with the celery, bay leaves, and 3 cups cold water. Bring to a boil, cover the pan, and adjust heat to maintain a gentle, steady simmer. Cook until the lentils are almost tender, about 20 minutes or longer, depending on size.
- Meanwhile, pour 4 tablespoons of olive oil into the skillet and set

it over medium heat. Stir in the garlic and onion, and cook for 5 minutes or more, until the onion is soft and glistening. Drop the peperoncino into a hot spot in the pan, and let it toast for a minute, then stir in the crushed tomatoes, season with a teaspoon of salt, and bring the sauce to a simmer. Let it bubble gently for about 5 minutes, until slightly thickened.

- When the lentils are just slightly undercooked, pour in all the tomato sauce from the skillet, and stir into the lentils. Return the sauce to a simmer, and cook, partially covered, until the lentils are fully cooked and tender, about 10 minutes. Remove the cover, stir in the remaining teaspoon of salt, and let the lentils cook slowly, stirring frequently, until they're very thick and starting to fall apart, another 10 minutes or so. Remove the pan from the heat, and stir in the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil.

I prefer the lentils hot or warm as a crostini topping or contorno, but they are very good at room temperature, too. For crostini, grill or toast the bread slices, spoon a mound of lentils on each crostino, and drizzle on a bit of fine olive oil.



Bucatini All'Amatriciana/ Bucatini with Pancetta, Tomato and Onion

Makes 6 Servings

“Lidia’s Italy” – Knopf 2007

This classic and delectable pasta dish originated in the region of Abruzzo, in the little town of Amatrice, northeast of Rome, where it was traditionally prepared without tomatoes. But it is the Roman version of pasta all’Amatriciana with tomatoes that I share with you here—the version that is best known and deservedly popular.

Lots of onions, chips of pancetta, guanciale (cured pork cheek) or bacon, and San Marzano tomatoes are the essential elements of the sauce, Roma style. Note that the onions are first softened in water, before olive oil is added to pan—a traditional but unusual step that is said to make the onions sweeter.

The standard pasta used is bucatini or perciatelli (spaghetti is only tolerated). The long, dry strands of perciatelli resemble very thick spaghetti but are hollow like a drinking straw. When cooked, they are wild and wiggly, so you might be tempted to cut them. Do not—once you’ve got them on your fork they’re delicious and fun to eat. It is quite all right to slurp them. Indeed, as kids we would suck them in so fast that the end of the noodle would whip us in the nose, splattering sauce all over our face. What a wonderful memory!

Ingredients:

- One 28-ounce can of Italian plum tomatoes (preferably San Marzano)
- ½ Cup water
- 4 Cups onion slices (1/3-inch thick), about 3/4 pound
- 4 Tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil plus more serving

- 4 Plump garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
- ½ Teaspoon coarse sea salt or to taste plus 1 tablespoon for the pasta pot
- 6 Ounces bacon (about 6 thick-cut strips) cut crosswise in 1/2-inch pieces
- ½ Teaspoon peperoncino
- 1 Pound perciatelli or bucatini
- 1 Cup grated Pecorino Romano cheese, plus more for passing

Recommended equipment:

- A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 13 or 14 inches diameter

Directions:

- Cook the sauce and heat the pasta water.
- Drain the canned tomatoes; save all the juices. Cut each tomato in quarters lengthwise; slice the quarters in strips, 1/2-inch wide.
- Start heating 6 quarts of water with 1 tablespoon of salt in a large pot to cook the bucatini.
- Put 1/2 cup water in the wide skillet and set it over medium-high heat. Dump in the sliced onions; spread them out and turn them over in the pan as the water starts to boil. Cook the onions, turning occasionally, for several minutes until they’re softened and the water is nearly evaporated.
- Pour the olive oil over the onions, toss in the crushed garlic cloves and sprinkle with 1/4 teaspoon salt. Stir well to coat all the onions with oil; cook for a couple of minutes or more, until onions and garlic are sizzling.
- Clear a space on one side of the skillet and spread the bacon pieces in it. Heat and stir the bacon in the hot spot for a minute or more until it’s rendering fat and sizzling, then stir it all in with the onions. Sprinkle the peperoncino in the pan, stir and let everything cook for 4 or 5 minutes, until the onions and bacon are caramelized and golden—adjust the heat so nothing burns.
- Now spill all the sliced tomatoes and their juices into the skillet and stir well. Rinse the tomato containers with a couple cups of “slosh” water and stir that in too; season with salt lightly. Bring the sauce to a boil, stirring frequently, and then lower the heat to keep it simmering actively. Let the sauce cook and thicken for about 20 minutes or until it has the consistency you like for pasta. (If you’re pressed for time, concentrate the sauce at a boil, stirring frequently.)
- When the tomatoes have been added and the sauce is simmering, you can start cooking the bucatini. (If you prefer, prepare the sauce ahead of time. Stop cooking when nearly thickened and let it cool. Return it to the simmer as your pasta cooks.)
- With the water at a rolling boil, slide the bucatini into the pasta pot, letting the strands soften so they don’t break and fanning them out so they don’t stick together. Stir well, cover the pot to bring the water back to boil over high heat then cook partially covered.
- Stir the bucatini occasionally and check doneness frequently. When the sauce has thickened, taste it and adjust seasoning—keep in mind that the Pecorino will add salt.
- When the bucatini are cooked through but still al dente, lift them from the cooking pot with tongs, drain for just a moment, then drop them right onto the simmering sauce. Toss together continuously, over moderate heat, for a couple of minutes, until the pasta is perfectly cooked and evenly coated with sauce. If the dish is dry, ladle in a bit of hot pasta water from the cooking pot. If the sauce is soupy, toss over higher heat to concentrate.
- Turn off the heat and toss in the grated cheese. Drizzle over a final flourish of olive oil and serve, either directly from the skillet or in a warm serving bowl, passing additional cheese at the table. ►

Anatra Povera/ Everyday Roasted Duck

Serves 4 to 6

“Lidia Cooks from the Heart of Italy”
– Knopf 2009

This crispy-skinned duck is delicious but definitely not fancy. “Povera” means “poor,” and this is a rustic, family-style dish, with relatively few ingredients and simple preparation. The duck is roasted whole and basted with a whisked-together dressing of lemon juice, wine and olive oil. It crisps up beautifully, and the pan juices make a great sauce. You don’t have to fuss much with the serving, either. For a family meal, I chop the bird into small pieces, pile them up on a platter—necks and giblets, too—and let people pick the pieces they like. (Fingers are fine for this, so plenty of moist towels on the table should be handy.)

For a more orderly dinner, the duck can be quartered to serve four nicely.

Quince, Cranberry and Apple Sauce

Makes about 4 cups

“Lidia’s Family Table” Knopf 2005

If you haven’t cooked quince before, this is a good way to start. The sauce is tangy, not overly sweet, and because the fruit pieces tend to stay intact when cooked, you will enjoy the distinctive taste and texture. You also can enjoy it spooned onto buttered toast or stirred into a bowl of yogurt, for a tangy snack.

Ingredients:

- 6 Whole cloves, and/or a small piece of cinnamon stick
- Grated zest of a large orange
- Fresh juice of a large orange
- ½ Cup honey, plus more to taste
- ½ Cup warm water, plus more as needed
- 2 or 3 ripe quince (about 12 oz.)
- 1 Large or 2 small tart, firm apples
- 12 Ounces (1 bag) whole cranberries, fresh or frozen

Ingredients:

- 1 Whole duck, about 5 pounds, with giblets and neck
- 1 Tablespoon kosher salt
- 4 Sprigs fresh rosemary
- 1 Cup dry white wine
- ½ Cup freshly squeezed lemon juice (from 3 or 4 large lemons)
- ¼ Cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1-2 Cups light poultry (or vegetable) stock

Recommended equipment:

- Kitchen twine
- Heavy-duty flameproof roasting pan with a flat wire roasting rack, preferably just large enough to hold the duck with an inch or so empty space around it.
- A fat-separating measuring cup (2 cups or larger)
- Poultry shears or heavy knife for splitting the duck
- Bulb baster

Directions:

- Put into saucepan the spices, orange zest, orange juice and honey, sloshing out the cup with the warm water.
- Rinse the quince, cut them in quarters, and peel off the skin. Pare out the core and the seeds, and then slice each wedge crosswise in pieces about 1/3 inches thick. Drop the quince chunks into the saucepan, and set it over moderate heat. Stir as the honey dissolves and the liquid comes to a bubbling simmer. Cover the pan, lower the heat and cook slowly for about 5 minutes, until the quince chunks have started to soften; don’t let them get mushy. Remove from heat.
- While the quinces are cooking, peel, quarter and core the apples, and cut into pieces the same size as the quince. Rinse and drain the cranberries. Stir the apple pieces and berries into the pan. The syrupy liquid should just reach the top of the fruit; add water (or more orange juice) if there’s not enough.
- Put a cover on the pan and set it over medium-high heat. Bring the syrup back to the

Directions:

- Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven, and heat to 400 degrees.
- Remove all clods of fat from the duck cavities, and trim any loose flaps of skin. Rinse the bird, including the giblets and neck, and pat dry with paper towels.
- Sprinkle a teaspoon of the salt inside the belly cavity, and push in the rosemary sprigs. With the breast side up, twist and fold the wing tips so they stay in place under the bird. Cross the legs over the cavity opening and tie the ends together tightly with kitchen twine. Chop the duck neck into two or three pieces, and scatter in the bottom of the pan, along with the giblets, under or around the wire rack. Set the duck, breast side up, on the roasting rack in the pan.
- Whisk the wine, lemon juice, and olive oil vigorously together until emulsified, and

boil, and cook about 4 minutes, until the cranberries are starting to pop (a bit longer if the berries were frozen).

- Uncover, and simmer until the cranberries have broken up and turned to sauce, about 10 minutes. Stir frequently but gently, so the quince and apple chunks stay intact. Remove from the heat while the sauce is still pourable – it will thicken as it cools. Taste, and stir in honey if you want a sweeter sauce.
- Cool briefly, and then lay a piece of plastic wrap on top of the sauce to keep a skin from forming. Serve slightly warm or at room temperature. This sauce can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. (You can freeze the sauce; the consistency will change, but the flavor will be fresh.)



pour all over the duck skin. Sprinkle the remaining 2 teaspoons salt over the bird, making sure that the sides are moistened and salted as well as the breast.

- Roast the duck for an hour, breast up, then baste it all over with the pan juices, using a bulb baster or large spoon—tilt the roasting pan carefully to scoop up the liquid. Continue to roast for another 1 to 1 1/2 hours, basting the bird every 30 minutes or so, until it is dark gold and very crisp all over.
- Remove the duck to a platter, take out the rack, and gather the giblets and neck pieces onto the platter, too. Carefully pour the hot juices from the pan into a fat separator (or other heatproof

container), and let the fat gather on top. Pour the good juices out of the separator into the roasting pan—if you don't have a separator, spoon off all the fat first—then pour in a cup or more of stock, so you have at least 1 1/2 cups liquid to deglaze the pan and cook into sauce.

- Set the roasting pan over medium-high heat on top of the stove, and bring the liquids to a boil, vigorously scraping up all the caramelized bits on the bottom of the pan. Let the juices reduce until slightly thickened and flavorful, then turn off the heat.
- In the meantime, cut up the duck into small pieces to serve family-style: First split open the breast, cutting through the center of the breast bone with

poultry shears or a chef's knife. Cut along the backbone to divide the bird in half, then slice each half into a wing, leg, thigh, and two or three breast pieces. Pile the cut pieces on a serving platter, along with the roasted neck and giblet morsels. Keep warm and when the sauce is ready, pour the pan sauce all over. Let people take the pieces they like the most.

- To quarter the duck to serve four: Split it in two as above, cutting along both sides of the backbone so it can be removed. Divide each duck half into a breast piece and a joined leg and thigh, set each quarter on a warm dinner plate, and nap with the pan sauce.



Pane di Cioccolato al Cucchiaio/ Chocolate Bread Parfait

Serves 6

This recalls for me the chocolate-and-bread sandwiches that sometimes were my lunch, and always a special treat. And it is another inventive way surplus is used in Umbrian cuisine, with leftover country bread serving as the foundation of an elegant layered dessert. Though it is soaked with chocolate and espresso sauce and buried in whipped cream, the bread doesn't disintegrate, and provides a pleasing textural contrast in every heavenly spoonful.

Ingredients:

- 8 Ounces bittersweet or semi-sweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 8 Ounces country-style white bread, crusts removed
- 1/2 Cup freshly brewed espresso
- 2 Tablespoons dark rum
- 2 Tablespoons sugar
- 1 1/2 Cups chilled heavy cream
- 1 Cup sliced almonds, toasted

Recommended equipment:

- A large, rimmed tray or baking sheet, such as a half-sheet pan (12 by 18 inches)
- A spouted measuring cup, 1 pint or larger
- 6 parfait glasses or wineglasses, preferably balloonshaped

Directions:

To make the dish's filling:

- Put the chopped chocolate in a bowl set in a pan of hot (not boiling) water. When the chocolate begins to melt, stir until completely smooth. Keep it warm, over the water, and off the heat.
- Slice the bread into half-inch-thick slices and lay them flat in one layer, close together, on the tray or baking sheet.
- Pour the warm espresso into a spouted measuring cup, stir in the rum and sugar until sugar dissolves, and then stir in half of the melted chocolate. Pour the

sauce all over the bread slices, then flip them over on the tray to make sure all the surfaces are coated. Let the bread absorb the sauce for a few minutes.

- Meanwhile, whip the cream until soft peaks form, by hand or with an electric mixer.

To assemble the parfaits:

- Break the bread into 1-inch pieces. Use half the pieces to make the bottom parfait layer in the six serving glasses, dropping an equal amount of chocolate bread into each. Scrape up some of the unabsorbed chocolate sauce that remains on the baking sheet, and drizzle a bit over the bread layers. Next, drop a layer of whipped cream in the glasses, using up half the cream. Top the cream layer with toasted almonds, using half the nuts.
- Repeat the layering sequence: drop more soaked bread into each glass, drizzle on it the chocolate sauce from the tray and the remaining melted chocolate. Dollop another layer of whipped cream in the glasses, using it all up, and sprinkle the remaining almonds on top of each parfait. This dessert is best when served immediately while the melted chocolate is still warm and runny. ▲