



## *Pesce* FISH

In all the regions around the coastlines of Italy, from the Gulf of Trieste to the Lagoon of Venice and then round towards the Marche, Abruzzi and Puglia, fish can be found on the daily menu in a multitude of recipes – often basically the same one, but with subtle changes from village to village. Italy also has many rivers and lakes which produce wonderful freshwater fish like tench, trout, carp and eel.

Eating fish is becoming more popular in Italy, but it is expensive because of dwindling stocks. There is a brilliant law in Italy whereby restaurants have to declare on the menu if the fish offered is fresh or frozen, the latter naturally being much cheaper.



*Trota in Cartoccio*

## TROUT BAKED IN FOIL

This cooking method, designed to keep in all the juices and aromas, has been in use since Roman times. Then, they would cook foods enclosed in terracotta, while now we wrap in foil and oven-bake to achieve the same result. So long as the little packages are well sealed, you could also try cooking this on a charcoal grill.

SERVES 4

4 rainbow trout, about 250g each  
32 thin slices of lemon  
salt and pepper  
1 little bunch chervil, divided into 4  
1 bunch parsley, divided into 4  
100g unsalted butter

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas 6. Have ready 4 pieces of foil large enough to wrap the fish fairly loosely.

Clean the trout and remove the scales and all the innards (or get your fishmonger to do this). Wash the trout, and dry them. Cut off the fins. Make 4 incisions in one side of each fish with a knife.

Arrange the 4 pieces of foil on your work surface, and on each, place 4 slices of lemon. In the cavity of each fish, put some salt and pepper, a quarter of the herbs and 15g butter, cut into small pieces. Close the trout and place each one on top of the lemon slices on the foil, cut-side up. Divide the remaining butter, in pieces, between the fish, rubbing into the cuts. Season each fish with salt and pepper, then add another 4 lemon slices to the top of each. Close the foil around each fish to produce a bag.

Bake in the preheated oven for just 20 minutes. The fish are delicious served with a simple boiled potato salad.

Merluzzo alla Napoletana

## COD WITH TOMATOES AND OLIVES

In Napoli they use both salted and fresh cod. Because it is easier to come by, and does not involve the lengthy process of washing and de-salting associated with the salted variety, I have suggested you use fresh cod here (though you can substitute it for the salted cod should you wish).

This dish is excellent served just with some freshly boiled waxy potatoes.

SERVES 4

4 fresh cod steaks, about 150g each  
plain flour, to coat  
8 tbsp olive oil  
2 garlic cloves, peeled and sliced  
400g canned chopped tomatoes  
60g pitted black olives  
1 tbsp fresh oregano or 1 tsp dried  
salt and pepper

Pour 2 tbsp of the olive oil into a large frying pan and heat gently. Coat the steaks with the flour, add to the pan and fry for 5 minutes on each side. Drain on kitchen paper and set aside.



In another pan, put the remaining 6 tbsp olive oil and fry the garlic slices for a few minutes, until just before they change colour. Add the tomatoes, olives, oregano, salt and pepper, and fry for 5 minutes.

Put the steak in the pan with the rest of the ingredients and heat minimally to absorb the flavours. Serve with boiled potatoes.

Pesce Spala Muddica

## GRILLED BREADED SWORDFISH

*Muddica* is a sort of magic ingredient for Sicilians. Basically, it is fresh, flavoured breadcrumbs, which are used in a variety of ways – to stuff sardines, to coat a slice of fish to be grilled, as here, or even as a cheap, delicious alternative to sprinkling Parmesan on pasta.

SERVES 4

4 swordfish (or tuna) steaks, about 150g each  
150g fresh white breadcrumbs, finely processed  
2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
1 garlic clove, peeled and puréed  
1 tbsp very finely chopped parsley  
salt and pepper

Preheat the grill to medium-hot, and have the fish at room temperature.

Place the breadcrumbs, olive oil, garlic and parsley in a bowl and season to taste with salt and pepper. Mix the ingredients with your fingers to obtain almost moist but loose breadcrumbs. Coat the fish steaks with the breadcrumb mixture on both sides.

Put the coated steaks under the preheated grill and cook for 5 minutes on each side. Serve with a rocket and chicory salad.



### TO MAKE IT MORE SPECIAL

Cheese is not usual with fish, but you can add a little freshly grated Parmesan to the breadcrumbs for the coating, about 50g. It changes the flavour very subtly, and is good with tuna or swordfish.

*Orata all'Acqua Pazza*

## POACHED SEA BREAM

In a few restaurants offering southern Italian food, you may find this curious recipe. I have called it *alla aqua pazza*, which translates literally as cooked in 'mad water', though it is often found as *all'acqua di mare*, as it is usually cooked in sea water. As sea water may be difficult to come by, here I have simply added salt to ordinary water to re-create the effect.

SERVES 4

2 x 600g sea bream, cleaned  
1 bunch flat-leaf parsley  
1 bunch chervil  
16 lemon slices  
500ml water  
200ml olive oil  
50g salt  
a few black peppercorns

Put the fish in a shallow pan large enough to take both with not much space around them. Divide the herbs and lemon slices between the fish, pushing them into the cavities. Pour in the water and oil, which should cover the fish. Add the salt and peppercorns.

Put the pan on the stove and bring to the boil quickly. Reduce the heat and simmer slowly for 15–18 minutes. Serve with boiled Savoy cabbage.





*Sardine alla griglia con Salmoriglio*  
**GRILLED FRESH SARDINES  
WITH GREEN SALSA**

These little fish, which, like mackerel, contain oils that are beneficial to our health, are popular throughout the Mediterranean. This quick, tasty dish can also be eaten in smaller portions as a wonderful *antipasto*.

SERVES 4

16 large fresh sardines, gutted and cleaned  
salt and pepper  
1 lemon, cut into quarters

**SALMORIGLIO**

150ml extra virgin olive oil  
juice of 2 lemons, finely grated rind of 1  
1 small chilli, finely chopped  
1 garlic clove, peeled and very finely chopped  
4 tbsp finely chopped parsley

Preheat the barbecue or charcoal grill to hot.

Mix the *salmoriglio* ingredients together in a small bowl.

Put the sardines directly onto a hot charcoal grill. Sprinkle them with salt, brush with a little of the *salmoriglio* and cook for 5 minutes per side. Serve the sardines either hot or cold, with the lemon quarters and the remainder of the *salmoriglio*.



*Sgombro in Carpione*

## MARINATED FRIED MACKEREL

A flavoursome fish packed with healthy oils, Mackerel is not appreciated as much as it ought to be – while many people love it, others are indifferent, but cooked and marinated this way, the fish assumes another dimension, which should please everybody.

SERVES 4

4 large fresh mackerel, filleted (get your fishmonger to do this)  
plain flour, to dust  
salt and pepper  
olive oil, for shallow-frying

### MARINADE

2 large onions, finely sliced  
100ml olive oil  
30g caster sugar  
100ml white wine vinegar  
1 bunch mint

Dip the mackerel fillets in seasoned flour, and shake off the surplus. Pour enough olive oil into a large frying pan to cover the base generously and heat until it sizzles. Fry the fish fillets until golden on each side, about 5–7 minutes, depending on size. Set aside to cool.

Prepare the marinade by frying the onions in the olive oil until soft, about 5–7 minutes. Add the sugar, vinegar and mint leaves and season well.

Make layers of fish fillets in a ceramic container, interspersing them with onion and herbs. Pour the remaining juice over the top and refrigerate.

Serve the next day with some hot boiled potatoes. Alternatively, cut the fillets into slivers and add to a simple green salad.



### LEFTOVERS

Leftover mackerel fillets will keep for a few days in the fridge and can be used to make a pâté, so long as you remove all the tiny bones. Process to a cream in a blender or processor, and serve spread on *crostini*.

*Gamberetti di Michele*

## MICHELE'S PINK SHRIMPS

This interesting dish of small prawns is named after a man I met in Palermo while I was filming a series for BBC TV, who produced it for me on the roadside charcoal grill he was tending. To make it, you will need a rectangular aluminium tray, plus aluminium foil to cover.

SERVES 4

500g very fresh pink shrimps  
juice of 2 lemons (Sicilian if possible)  
80ml olive oil  
2 garlic cloves, peeled and halved  
a handful of flat-leaf parsley leaves  
salt and pepper  
50ml brandy

Put the shrimps in an aluminium tray, add the lemon juice, olive oil, garlic, parsley and some salt and pepper. Give it a mix, then add the brandy. Seal the tray with aluminium foil and place on a hot (preferably charcoal) grill. Leave to cook for 20 minutes.

These shrimps are wonderful eaten with your fingers!



### ALTERNATIVES

Similar to *in cartoccio* (see page 131), this is a good way of cooking on a charcoal grill if you want to maintain the juices of fish or meat. Little slivers of filleted delicate fish, like sole, can also be cooked in this way – simply substitute them for the prawns.

*Gamberoni con Aglio, olio e Peperoncino*

## SAUTÉED GIANT PRAWNS WITH GARLIC, OIL AND CHILLI

Extremely simple but very impressive, this dish follows my cooking motto, MOF, MOF (Minimum Of Fuss, Maximum Of Flavour). However, you do need the freshest prawns you can lay your hands on. The wonderful Imperial prawns are best for this recipe, so talk to your fishmonger and see whether he can get hold of some for you.

SERVES 4

16 fresh giant prawns  
100ml olive oil  
juice of 1 lemon  
3 garlic cloves, peeled and sliced  
1 red chilli, finely chopped

Peel only the body of the prawns, leaving the heads intact (they are full of juice).

Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan until it just starts to sizzle. Add the prawns and, over a high heat now, cook them on both sides until they change colour, head included. This should take about 3 minutes. Sprinkle with lemon juice, and add the garlic and chilli.

Serve the prawns on a portion of the sauce in individual bowls. To eat, remove the heads from the prawns and squeeze all the wonderful juices into the sauce.

### LEFTOVERS

If you find yourself in the unlikely situation of having any of these prawns leftover, simply make them into a delicious pasta sauce. Prepare a tomato sauce of either fresh or canned chopped tomatoes (see page 69). Roughly chop the prawns and add them to the sauce together with a handful of chopped parsley.



*Impepata Ji Molluschi*  
**SHELLFISH FRICASSEE**

*Impepata* is a southern Italian dialect word for a dish full of pepper, usually applied to a dish of black mussels, with a few other shellfish when available. I have suggested clams here, but some razor clams, if small enough, would be a delightful addition.

SERVES 4-6

100ml extra virgin olive oil  
2 garlic cloves, peeled and coarsely chopped  
1 small fresh red chilli, finely chopped  
1.5kg black mussels, cleaned and prepared (see page 58)  
1.5kg large clams, cleaned and prepared (see page 58)  
500ml dry white wine  
3 tbsp finely chopped flat-leaf parsley  
abundant freshly and coarsely ground black pepper

Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan and fry the garlic and chilli for 1-2 minutes. Add all the shellfish, along with the wine and parsley. Put the lid on and cook until all the shells are open, about 4 minutes, shaking the pan occasionally. They should start to open quite quickly, but keep

on the heat until all are open. Discard any shells that remain closed.

Add lots of black pepper. Stir well and serve in bowls, with lots of bread to mop up the sauce.



**LEFTOVERS**  
Prepare a tomato sauce of either fresh or canned chopped tomatoes (see page 69) and add any leftover shellfish to make a delicious pasta sauce.

*Insalata Ji Mare*  
**SEAFOOD SALAD**

What could be more wonderful in the height of summer than a lovely, freshly made seafood salad, eaten with *grissini* and washed down with a glass or two of crisp, dry, chilled white wine! The combination of fish to choose from is endless. Here are some suggestions: small razor clams, clams, prawns, small octopus, squid, cuttlefish, black mussels, scallops, etc. The choice is yours.

SERVES 4

600g freshly prepared and raw seafood  
(see above)  
salt and pepper  
50ml extra virgin olive oil  
juice of 1 lemon  
2 garlic cloves, peeled and halved  
2 tbsp finely chopped flat-leaf parsley

Cook the seafood for a few minutes in boiling salted water. Drain well and put in a large bowl.

Mix together the olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, parsley and lots of pepper, and dress the seafood. This salad can be eaten either hot or cold.

**TIP**  
If you like garlic, but want the flavour to be gentler than above, then omit the two garlic cloves suggested, take a half clove instead, peel it and rub around the inside of the salad bowl you will use, before discarding.