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**Cook**

# Sicilian-American

**Food**



Recipes with love from  
**The Robot Book Club**

# **Cook Sicilian- American Food**

*A Celebration of Family Recipes, from Palermo to Sunday Suppers*

The Robot Book Club

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# Preface

This book, and The Robot Book Club, is an experiment large scale AI generation. Every page, from layout to images to copy, was generated with zero human review.

The authoring and publishing teams were implemented in the Kaya scripting language. They were given only the input: Sicilian-American.

This is the only page authored by a human: Hello there!

— Ted Benson

# Prologue

There's a scent that clings to memory. Not the idealized perfume of a Sicilian hillside, but something more primal, more immediate. The slow-simmering gravity of garlic and tomatoes on a Sunday afternoon. The sharp, clean bite of fennel, even in winter. It's the undeniable scent of home for a particular kind of American—those whose lineage traces back to a small island, whose tables hosted a specific language of food. This isn't a fantasy of ancient Sicily. This is about what *is*, right here, in your kitchen.

Sicilians arrived on these shores with little more than resourcefulness. They carried the principles of *cucina povera* in their bones—the art of coaxing monumental flavor from humble ingredients. But America was different. It offered abundance: cheap meat, rivers of cow's milk, supermarket aisles bursting with possibility. So, the food adapted. The austere *pasta con le sarde* embraced tinned fish. Sheep's milk cannoli softened, sweetened, became an American icon. These weren't betrayals of tradition. They were brilliant, delicious acts of culinary evolution, forged by necessity and a fierce desire for comfort. To dismiss them as "inauthentic" is to miss the entire point.

This isn't a collection demanding exotic pilgrimage ingredients. This book understands the modern American kitchen, the busy weeknight, the longing for that taste without impossible demands. It's about leveraging the practical—the supermarket fennel bulb, the reliable can of San Marzanos—to recreate a depth of flavor that usually takes generations. We're talking about the sheet-pan *sfincione* that brings Palermo street food to your Friday night, the robust Sunday *sugo* that anchors the week, and the unapologetically American-Sicilian cannoli.

These pages hold more than just recipes. They are an invitation to reconnect with a legacy of grit, adaptation, and profound flavor. They are the stories of a people, told through the dishes that sustained them, celebrated them, and ultimately, defined them. It's time to find that scent of home again. It's time to cook.





# Tuesday Night Cucina Povera: Sicilian Pantry Magic

*Honoring the Sicilian tradition of l'arte dell'arrangiarsi (the art of making do) with rapid, economical, pantry-driven suppers for busy weeknights.*

There is a profound dignity in cucina povera. The true magic of Sicilian food wasn't born in a palace, but in the frantic, exhausted margins of a Tuesday night. This is l'arte dell'arrangiarsi—the stubborn, beautiful art of making do. When the fridge is bare and the paycheck is days away, the Sicilian-American kitchen

doesn't panic. It improvises, wringing every last drop of flavor from a forgotten can of chickpeas, a bag of dried lentils, and whatever toasted breadcrumbs are left in the jar.

These aren't compromise meals. A quick sheet-pan eggplant parmigiana or a pantry-raided pasta con le sarde hits with the kind of deep, unapologetic comfort that fancy restaurants spend lifetimes trying to fake. It is survival food elevated to a sacrament, pulled from accessible supermarket staples and ready for the table in under an hour.





# Pasta c'Anciova e Muddica Atturrata

*PAHS-tah cahn-CHOH-vah eh mood-DEE-kah aht-toor-RAH-tah*

Long before pantry cooking became a lifestyle brand, Sicilian working-class grandmothers were performing absolute alchemy with cans and jars. This is cucina povera at its finest—a brilliant, resourceful peasant dish built entirely from shelf-stable ingredients for the days when fresh fish was too expensive or the Mediterranean heat too oppressive. The magic relies on two uncompromising steps: melting anchovies into hot olive oil until they completely surrender into a savory umami base, and patiently toasting breadcrumbs to mimic the texture of grated cheese. It is sweet, salty, deeply nostalgic, and requires zero trips to the store on a busy Tuesday night.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 cup</b>	plain dry breadcrumbs	<b>8</b>	anchovy fillets packed in olive oil
<b>2 tbsp</b>	extra-virgin olive oil		
<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/2 cup</b>	double-concentrated tomato paste
<b>1/3 cup</b>	dark raisins <i>roughly chopped if using large raisins</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	pine nuts
<b>1/4 cup</b>	extra-virgin olive oil	<b>1 lb</b>	Mafalde, Reginette, or Bucatini pasta
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>very finely minced</i>	<b>1 pinch</b>	black pepper
<b>1 large</b>	garlic clove <i>minced</i>	<b>1 pinch</b>	sugar

## PREPARATION

- **Stage your ingredients before turning on the stove.**

Once the onions are soft, the sauce comes together rapidly. Having your tomato paste, drained raisins, and pine nuts ready ensures nothing burns while you're opening jars.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Plump the raisins in warm water.**

Place the raisins in a small bowl and cover them with warm water for 10 to 15 minutes to reconstitute them, ensuring bursts of sweetness in the final dish, then drain well before using.

- 2. Toast the breadcrumbs until deeply golden.**

In a medium skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil over medium-low heat, add the breadcrumbs and a pinch of salt, and stir constantly with a wooden spoon until they reach a deep amber color. Do not walk away; they can burn in seconds.

Transfer immediately to a cool bowl.

**1. Build the aromatic base.**

Bring a large pot of heavily salted water to a boil. In a large, heavy-bottomed skillet or Dutch oven, heat the remaining 1/4 cup of olive oil over medium-low heat. Sauté the minced onion gently for 5 to 7 minutes until completely translucent, then add the garlic and cook for 30 seconds.

**2. Melt the anchovies into the hot oil.**

Push the onions to the edge of the skillet and add the anchovy fillets to the center. Mash them into the hot oil with the back of your spoon; within a few minutes, they will completely dissolve into a savory, aromatic liquid.

**3. Fry the tomato paste to create the sauce.**

Squeeze the tomato paste into the skillet and let it fry in the oil for about a minute to deepen its flavor. Add 1 cup of warm water and stir vigorously to loosen the paste and create a thick, glossy sauce.

**4. Marry the sweet and savory flavors.**

Stir in the drained raisins and pine nuts, season generously with black pepper, and add a tiny pinch of sugar if the tomato paste is overly acidic. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and let the sauce simmer gently for 10 to 15 minutes.

**5. Cook and toss the pasta.**

Drop the pasta into the boiling water and cook until exactly al dente. Reserve a half-cup of starchy pasta water, drain the pasta, and toss it vigorously in the skillet with the sauce over medium heat for 1 to 2 minutes, adding pasta water if the sauce is too tight.

**6. Serve smothered in the toasted breadcrumbs.**

Transfer the pasta to a platter or individual bowls and generously blanket the top with the reserved muddica atturrata, serving immediately.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **A note on the breadcrumbs.**

Do not use Panko. Standard, fine supermarket breadcrumbs mimic the traditional agrarian texture much better and provide the correct poor man's Parmesan mouthfeel.

- **Trust the anchovies.**

Don't be afraid of the quantity of anchovies. Once they melt into the oil and tomato paste, they cease being a fish and become a pure, savory, umami seasoning.



# Casarecce alla Norma

*kah-sah-RETCH-eh ah-lah NOR-mah*

If there is one dish that captures the undisputed, ungentrified soul of Catania on a plate, it is Pasta alla Norma. Born of necessity and named for a Bellini opera by a playwright who recognized a masterpiece, this is cucina povera at its absolute finest. The secret a Sicilian grandmother would fiercely guard is simple: you must fry the eggplant. Do not bake it, do not peel it. Frying the dark skin and spongy flesh in hot oil yields a molten, silky interior that defines the old-world flavor of the dish. Traditionally finished with aged ricotta salata, a firm block of Greek feta or Mexican cotija perfectly mimics that dry, salty snowfall for a busy weeknight in the American suburbs.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 large</b>	globe eggplant <i>unpeeled and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>	<b>3/4 lb</b>	dried casarecce pasta
<b>3 tbsp</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>1 large bunch</b>	fresh basil <i>leaves picked</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	neutral frying oil	<b>1/2 cup</b>	firm feta or cotija cheese <i>crumbled or freshly grated</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	extra-virgin olive oil	<b>to taste</b>	kosher salt
<b>3 large</b>	garlic <i>smashed but kept whole</i>	<b>to taste</b>	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
<b>28 oz</b>	whole peeled tomatoes or Italian passata <i>crushed by hand if using whole tomatoes</i>	<b>1 pinch</b>	crushed red pepper flakes

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Toss the eggplant cubes with flour to create a microscopic seal.

Place the unpeeled cubes in a large bowl, sprinkle with the flour, and toss vigorously with your hands until evenly dusted. This traditional trick prevents the spongy flesh from acting like a sponge and absorbing excess oil.

### 2. Fry the eggplant until deeply golden and molten inside.

Heat the neutral oil in a wide skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Working in two batches to avoid overcrowding, fry the cubes for 5 to 7 minutes until soft all the way through, transferring to a paper towel-lined plate and seasoning immediately with salt. Discard the remaining oil and wipe the skillet clean.

### 3. Build a fast, vibrant tomato sugo.

Return the skillet to medium heat with the extra-virgin olive oil, smashed garlic, and red pepper flakes. Sauté gently until the garlic is fragrant and golden but not burnt, then carefully pour in the crushed tomatoes. Season with salt and pepper, and simmer uncovered for 15 to 20 minutes to concentrate the sugars.

**1. Infuse the sauce with basil.**

Once the sauce has reduced and thickened, fish out and discard the garlic cloves. Tear half of the fresh basil leaves by hand and stir them into the sauce.

**2. Boil the casarecce until exactly al dente.**

While the sauce simmers, drop the pasta into a large pot of heavily salted boiling water. Before draining, scoop out a half cup of the starchy cooking water and set it aside.

**3. Marry the pasta and sauce in the skillet.**

Add the drained casarecce directly into the simmering tomato sauce along with exactly half of the fried eggplant cubes. Toss vigorously over medium heat for one minute, adding a splash of pasta water if needed to create a glossy glaze that coats every twist of the pasta.

**4. Garnish and serve immediately.**

Transfer the pasta to a warm serving platter or individual bowls. Crown with the remaining crispy eggplant, shower generously with the crumbled cheese, and finish with the remaining torn basil leaves.



# Pane Cunzatu

*pah-neh coon-ZAH-too*

In Sicily, they once called this the bread of misfortune. When a fisherman's pockets were empty, a humble loaf was rubbed with whatever potent staples sat in the pantry—heavy olive oil, dried oregano, perhaps a single anchovy—to make it taste like a feast. Today, it is the undisputed king of Sicilian street food. For a first-generation kid in an American suburb, this isn't just a sandwich; it is a sensory time machine. The secret isn't in the cooking, but the architecture: the bread must be hot enough to mimic a wood-fired oven, and the oiled halves must be pressed together to impregnate the crumb. Maximum old-world flavor, zero actual cooking.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 large</b>	rustic bread <i>left whole</i>	<b>8 large</b>	oil-packed anchovy fillets <i>broken into smaller pieces</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	extra virgin olive oil	<b>1 tbsp</b>	dried oregano
<b>3 med</b>	ripe tomatoes <i>sliced into 1/4-inch rounds</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	sea salt
<b>6 oz</b>	ricotta salata, young Manchego, or mild Pecorino Romano <i>sliced thinly</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Revive the bread.

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Place the whole loaf directly on the oven rack and heat it for 5 to 10 minutes, ensuring the crust becomes shatteringly crisp and the interior is beautifully warm.

### 2. Impregnate the crumb.

Remove the bread from the oven and carefully slice it in half horizontally. Generously drizzle the extra virgin olive oil over the cut sides of both the top and bottom halves, then press the two bare halves back together and rub them slightly to distribute the oil evenly into the crumb without leaving dry patches.

### 3. Build the foundation.

Open the bread back up and layer the sliced tomatoes evenly across the bottom half. Sprinkle the tomatoes lightly with sea salt to draw out their juices so they can mingle with the oil.

### 4. Add the riches.

Layer the thinly sliced cheese over the tomatoes, allowing the residual heat from the bread to just barely soften it. Scatter the broken anchovy fillets evenly over the cheese.

**1. Season and press.**

Take the dried oregano in your palm and rub your hands together briskly over the sandwich to release the dormant essential oils, then add a few cracks of black pepper. Place the top half of the bread onto the sandwich and press down firmly with your palms to marry the ingredients.

**2. Rest and serve.**

Let the sandwich sit for two minutes so the steam, tomato juices, and oil become one. Cut into thick wedges and eat immediately.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **A note on the cheese.**

The most authentic cheese for this dish is Sicilian primo sale, a young sheep's milk cheese that can be difficult to track down in a standard American supermarket. Ricotta salata or a young Spanish Manchego are brilliant, accessible substitutes that offer the exact same texture and salty bite.



# Broccoli Affucati

*vroo-koo-lee ah-foo-kah-tee*

Forget boiling your broccoli into a watery, sulfurous death. In Sicily, they suffocate it. This is the absolute essence of *cucina povera*—taking a humble supermarket crown, locking it in a heavy pot with cheap wine, sharp cheese, olives, and a few good anchovies, and trusting the process. The magic happens only if you keep your hands off the spoon. Let it drown, let it steam. What emerges is a deeply savory, melt-in-your-mouth revelation that tastes like it took all day. It's peasant wisdom at its finest.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	standard green broccoli <i>cut into medium florets, stems peeled and sliced into 1/4-inch coins, washed and left wet</i>	<b>1/3 cup</b>	oil-cured black olives <i>pitted and roughly chopped</i>
<b>1/3 cup</b>	extra virgin olive oil	<b>4 oz</b>	sharp provolone cheese <i>cut into small cubes</i>
<b>1 med</b>	white onion <i>sliced paper-thin</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	dry red wine
<b>5 large</b>	oil-packed anchovy fillets <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
		<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper

## PREPARATION

- **Salvage the stems.**

True cucina povera wastes nothing; peel the tough, woody green exterior from the broccoli stalks and slice the tender inner core into coins to cook with the florets.

- **Keep it wet.**

Do not dry the broccoli after washing it; that residual water is essential for creating the initial steam chamber inside the pot.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the foundation.**

Coat the bottom of a heavy Dutch oven with half the olive oil, then add half the wet broccoli, onions, anchovies, olives, and cheese, seasoning lightly with salt and heavily with pepper.

- 2. Complete the layers and compress.**

Layer the remaining broccoli, onions, anchovies, olives, and cheese, drizzle the rest of the oil over the top, and press everything down firmly with your hands to compact it.

**1. Suffocate the broccoli.**

Cover the pot with a heavy, tight-fitting lid, set over medium-low heat, and leave it completely undisturbed for 20 minutes to steam in its own trapped moisture.

**2. Drown it in wine.**

Quickly lift the lid, pour the red wine evenly over the collapsed vegetables, and immediately seal the lid back on to trap the vapors.

**3. Shake, never stir.**

Cook for another 15 to 20 minutes, grabbing the pot by the handles every 5 minutes to give it a firm shimmy to prevent sticking; do not stir or the layers will turn to mush.

**4. Rest and serve.**

Once a thick stem yields like warm butter when pierced with a knife, remove from heat and let rest for 10 minutes so the melted cheese binds the tender broccoli together.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Do not skip the anchovies.**

Even if you think you hate them, they are mandatory; they dissolve completely into the oil and provide a deep umami backbone, not a fishy flavor.

● **Trust the purple onions.**

The red wine will stain your onions a dark, bruised purple, which is exactly how this dish is supposed to look.

● **Equipment matters.**

A heavy cast-iron Dutch oven mimics the traditional Sicilian terracotta, maintaining the steady, even heat required to caramelize the bottom gently without scorching.



# Pasta e Piseddi

*PAH-stah eh pee-SEHD-dee*

If there is one dish that defines the stubborn resourcefulness of the Sicilian pantry, it is pasta e piseddi. Born of the old-world cucina povera, it magically elevates a bag of frozen peas and a box of small, tubular pasta into something luxurious. While standard-issue Italian-American joints often dump in heavy cream to fake that richness, the real secret is technique: puréeing a handful of the sweet peas and cooking the dry pasta directly in the broth so it releases its starch. Sweet, earthy, and finished with a distinctively Sicilian tear of fresh mint, this is what home actually tastes like on a busy weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 tbsp</b>	extra-virgin olive oil <i>plus more for drizzling</i>	<b>12 oz</b>	ditalini or small shell pasta
<b>1 med</b>	sweet yellow onion <i>very finely diced</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>16 oz</b>	frozen petite sweet peas <i>unthawed</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>4 cup</b>	water or low-sodium vegetable broth <i>kept hot</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh mint <i>roughly torn</i>
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	Pecorino Romano <i>freshly grated, plus more for serving</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Keep your cooking liquid hot.**

Keep your water or broth warm in a separate saucepan on an adjacent burner so it doesn't drop the temperature of the dish when added during the pasta cooking stage.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Melt the onion into the oil to build the flavor base.**

Heat the olive oil in a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven over medium-low heat, add the finely diced onion, and cook slowly until entirely translucent and sweet, about 6 to 8 minutes. Do not let it brown.

- 2. Simmer the peas.**

Add the frozen peas directly to the pot, tossing them in the onion-infused oil until glossy, then pour in 2 cups of the hot water or broth. Season generously with salt and pepper, and simmer for 5 minutes until tender but still bright green.

- 3. Purée a portion of the peas to create the cream.**

Ladle about a cup and a half of the peas and their cooking liquid into a blender or a tall container, and blend until completely smooth. Stir this vibrant green purée back into the pot.

**1. Cook the pasta directly in the sauce.**

Pour the dry ditalini into the bubbling pea mixture and add just enough hot liquid to barely cover the pasta. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently like risotto, adding more hot liquid a half-cup at a time as needed until the pasta is al dente.

**2. Emulsify the sauce off the heat.**

Remove the pot from the stove while it still looks slightly soupy, as the pasta will continue to absorb liquid as it cools. Vigorously stir in the grated Pecorino Romano and the torn fresh mint.

**3. Serve immediately.**

Ladle into warm, shallow bowls and finish each portion with a generous drizzle of high-quality raw olive oil and a final crack of black pepper.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Water is actually more authentic than broth.**

Traditional peasant cooking relies entirely on water to let the pure, sweet flavor of the peas and onions shine without interference, though a light vegetable broth works if you prefer a bolder backbone.

● **Trust the slightly soupy consistency.**

American home cooks often panic if there is liquid left in the pot, but a true Sicilian minestra sits somewhere between a standard pasta dish and a thick soup. It tightens up perfectly as it rests in the bowl.

● **Resist the urge to add meat or garlic.**

While Neapolitan versions often start with rendering pancetta, the canonical Sicilian dish focuses exclusively on the delicate, bright sweetness of the onions and peas. Keeping it vegetarian is lighter, cheaper, and truer to the island's Lent traditions.



# Spaghetti con Tonno, Capperi e Limone

If you grew up Italian-American in the rust belt, you know the magic of the dispensa—the pantry. On a Tuesday night when there was supposedly nothing in the house to eat, a masterpiece materialized in the exact time it took to boil a pot of water. This is authentic, bare-knuckle Sicilian cucina povera. The rules are absolute: you do not cook the canned tuna or it turns to dry cat food, and you never put cheese on seafood. Instead, we use muddica atturrata—toasted breadcrumbs infused with garlic and olive oil—known as the cheese of the poor. It's elemental, brilliant, and tastes exactly like the old country.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 cup</b>	plain unseasoned breadcrumbs	<b>4 med</b>	anchovy fillets packed in oil
<b>2 tbsp</b>	extra-virgin olive oil	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	crushed red pepper flakes
<b>1 small</b>	garlic clove <i>smashed but kept whole</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	capers <i>rinsed thoroughly and squeezed dry</i>
<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt	<b>12 oz</b>	olive oil-packed tuna <i>lightly drained</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	dried spaghetti	<b>1 large</b>	organic lemon <i>zested and halved</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	extra-virgin olive oil	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>2 large</b>	garlic cloves <i>smashed and peeled</i>	<b>1 pinch</b>	freshly cracked black pepper

## PREPARATION

- **Wash the lemon.**

Since you are grating the zest directly into the dish, run the lemon under warm water and give it a good scrub to remove any commercial wax.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the muddica atturrata.**

Place a large, deep skillet over medium-low heat with 2 tablespoons of olive oil and the small smashed garlic clove. Let the garlic sizzle for a minute to perfume the oil, discard it, then add the breadcrumbs and a pinch of salt, stirring constantly for 3 to 4 minutes until deeply golden brown. Transfer immediately to a small bowl to stop the cooking.

- 2. Boil the pasta until al dente.**

Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil, add a generous handful of salt so it tastes like the sea, and cook the spaghetti according to package instructions until firm to the bite.

**1. Build the flavor base.**

When the pasta has 5 minutes left, return the skillet to medium-low heat with 1/4 cup of olive oil, the 2 smashed garlic cloves, and the red pepper flakes. Once sizzling gently, add the anchovies and smash them into the oil with a wooden spoon until they dissolve into a paste, then add the rinsed capers for 1 minute.

**2. Take the skillet completely off the heat.**

Turn off the stove entirely and add the drained tuna, breaking it up slightly into large chunks, along with the lemon zest. Do not apply further heat; the residual warmth of the pan is all you need to warm the tuna and release the lemon oils.

**3. Emulsify the sauce with pasta water.**

Just before draining, scoop out about 1 cup of the cloudy, starchy pasta water. Transfer the drained spaghetti immediately to the skillet with the tuna mixture, add 1/2 cup of the reserved pasta water, the juice of half the lemon, and the chopped parsley. Toss vigorously with tongs for about 60 seconds until the starch binds the oil and lemon juice into a creamy, glossy sauce.

**4. Serve immediately.**

Twirl the pasta into warm bowls, adding a generous grind of black pepper, and top each serving heavily with the toasted muddica atturrata right before eating to preserve its crucial crunch.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Never cook the tuna.**

Applying direct heat to canned tuna turns it dry and metallic. Always fold it in off the heat, letting the residual warmth of the skillet and pasta do the work.

● **The pasta water is the sauce.**

Because this dish contains no dairy, the starch from the pasta water emulsifying with the olive oil is the only way to create a creamy coating. Vigorously tossing the pasta in the skillet is non-negotiable.



# Pallotte Cacio e Uova in Sugo

*pah-LOHT-teh CAH-cho eh WOH-vah een SOO-goh*

In the old immigrant neighborhoods, grandmothers possessed the profound, magical ability to turn a stale loaf of bread and a wedge of cheese into an absolute feast. The secret to this meatless salvage operation isn't in expensive ingredients, but in the ruthless squeezing of milk-soaked bread and the patience to let the dough rest. When these golden, aggressively savory orbs hit a simmering tomato sauce, they swell like little sponges, absorbing all that bright acidity while remaining incredibly tender—a Tuesday night masterpiece born out of pure necessity.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 tbsp</b>	extra-virgin olive oil	<b>1 cup</b>	Pecorino Romano cheese <i>grated</i>
<b>1 small</b>	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Parmigiano Reggiano cheese <i>grated</i>
<b>28 oz</b>	crushed tomatoes	<b>2 small</b>	garlic cloves <i>minced into a paste</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	water	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>5 large</b>	fresh basil leaves <i>torn</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	fine sea salt
<b>1/2 lb</b>	stale rustic Italian bread <i>crusts removed, torn into 1-inch cubes</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper
<b>1 cup</b>	whole milk	<b>2 cup</b>	neutral oil
<b>3 large</b>	eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Leave the bread out to stale.**

Buy a rustic Italian loaf a few days early and leave it on the counter in a paper bag for 48 hours to achieve the proper dry texture.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Hydrate the stale bread.**

Pour the milk over the bread cubes in a large bowl, tossing gently until coated, and let sit for five to ten minutes until completely soft.

- 2. Squeeze out the excess moisture.**

Reach into the bowl and aggressively wring out the bread by the handful to expel as much milk as possible, discarding the liquid so your meatballs don't become a dense, heavy paste.

**1. Mix the meatball dough.**

Crumble the squeezed bread into a clean bowl, adding the eggs, grated cheeses, garlic, parsley, salt, and pepper, then vigorously mash everything with your hands until it forms a cohesive, sticky dough.

**2. Rest the mixture in the refrigerator.**

Cover the bowl and let it chill for at least twenty minutes to allow the starches to fully hydrate and the cheeses to bind, guaranteeing they won't disintegrate in the hot oil.

**3. Start the tomato sauce.**

Heat the olive oil over medium heat in a wide skillet, sauté the diced onion until translucent, then add the crushed tomatoes and water, bringing it all to a gentle, bubbling simmer.

**4. Roll the meatballs.**

Slightly dampen your hands with tap water to prevent sticking, and roll the chilled dough firmly into balls about the size of a large walnut.

**5. Fry until golden brown.**

Heat a half-inch of neutral oil in a large frying pan until shimmering, then fry the meatballs in uncrowded batches until a deep, protective crust forms on all sides before draining them on paper towels.

**6. Simmer the meatballs in the sauce.**

Gently lower the fried balls into the bubbling tomato sauce and let them cook uncovered for ten to fifteen minutes, shaking the pan rather than stirring, until they swell and absorb the sweet tomato juices.

**7. Garnish and serve.**

Turn off the heat, scatter the torn fresh basil over the pan, and serve immediately with crusty bread or alongside a simple weeknight pasta.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **The leftovers are even better the next day.**

Like many cucina povera dishes, the flavors improve overnight as the meatballs fully marinate in the sauce, making for an incredible lunch.



# Friday Night Street Food: Palermo in a Sheet Pan

*Casual, communal street foods of Palermo and Catania adapted for standard American baking sheets.*

Friday night in Palermo smells like hot frying oil, aggressive yeast, and loud arguments. You can't exactly replicate the neon-lit chaos of the Vucciria market in a suburban American kitchen, but you can absolutely steal its soul. This is the food of the working class, unapologetically caloric and meant to be eaten with your hands while standing over a kitchen island, wiping grease from your chin.

Forget the tweezers and the plating. Here, the true, spongy, anchovy-laced sfincione, golden arancini, and sizzling chickpea panelle have been stripped of their grueling, day-long labor and engineered for a standard aluminum half-sheet pan. It's a tactical approach to feeding a loud, hungry room without losing your mind. Grab a cold beer, lay out the antipasto board, and let them eat.





# Sfincione Palermitano

*sfin-CHOO-nee*

Walk through the ancient, chaotic markets of Palermo—like Ballarò or the Vucciria—and you won't smell standard pizza. You will smell sfincione. The street vendors weave through the crowds shouting humble brags about their wares being scarce in oil and full of dust. It is the ultimate working-class street food. Sfincione is fundamentally a thick, highly hydrated sponge built to absorb a sweet, savory stew of melting onions and tomatoes. This isn't the sanitized Hollywood version of Italian cooking; this is the loud, proud food of the old neighborhood, smartly adapted for a Friday night in the Midwest. The

cheese and anchovies are buried deep into the dough to create hidden pockets of flavor, and the whole thing is buried under a toasted blanket of breadcrumbs.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 1/4 cup</b>	bread flour	<b>8</b>	anchovy fillets packed in oil <i>divided, half kept whole and half torn into small pieces</i>
<b>2 cup</b>	fine semolina flour	<b>28 oz</b>	crushed tomatoes
<b>2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>8 oz</b>	aged provolone or caciocavallo cheese <i>cut into 1/2-inch cubes</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	active dry yeast	<b>1/4 cup</b>	pecorino romano cheese <i>grated</i>
<b>2 tsp</b>	sugar <i>divided</i>	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	coarse breadcrumbs <i>pulsed from slightly stale rustic bread</i>
<b>1 3/4 cup</b>	warm water	<b>1 tbsp</b>	dried oregano
<b>3/4 cup</b>	extra virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>		
<b>3 large</b>	white or yellow onions <i>sliced into thin half-moons</i>		

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Mix the dough the night before.

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the bread flour, semolina flour, salt, yeast, and 1 teaspoon of the sugar. Pour in the warm water and 3 tablespoons of olive oil. Using your hands or a wooden spoon, mix aggressively until a shaggy, wet, and highly sticky dough forms. Do not add more flour; that wetness is the secret to the sponge. Cover tightly and leave at room temperature for 1 hour, then transfer to the refrigerator for 18 to 24 hours to develop that old-world bakery flavor.

**1. Make the onion stew.**

This is not a raw pizza sauce; it is a rich stew. Heat 3 tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet over medium-low heat. Add the sliced onions and a pinch of salt. Cook slowly, stirring occasionally, until the onions are incredibly soft, collapsed, and translucent, about 20 to 25 minutes. If they begin to brown too quickly, add a splash of water.

**2. Build the tomato sauce.**

Once the onions are soft, add the 4 whole anchovy fillets, stirring until they dissolve into the onions. Pour in the crushed tomatoes and the remaining 1 teaspoon of sugar. Simmer uncovered over low heat for 30 minutes until the sauce is thick and dark red. A watery sauce will ruin your dough. Remove from heat and let it cool.

**3. Prepare the muddica atturrata.**

In a medium skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil over medium heat. Add your fresh, coarse breadcrumbs. Toast them, stirring constantly, until they are deeply golden brown and smell nutty, about 4 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat, let cool slightly, and toss with the dried oregano.

**4. Stretch the sponge.**

Three hours before you want to eat, pour 1/4 cup of olive oil into a standard 13x18-inch rimmed half-sheet pan, using your fingers to coat the bottom and sides thoroughly. Scrape the cold dough into the center of the pan and gently press it out. If it springs back, walk away for 15 minutes to let the gluten relax, then press again until it reaches the edges. Cover with a damp towel and let it rise in a warm spot for 2 hours, until puffy, aerated, and doubled in height.

**5. Bury the cheese and anchovies.**

Preheat your oven to 400°F. Uncover the puffed dough. Using oiled fingers, press deep dimples all over the dough, just like you would for focaccia. Take your cheese cubes and the torn pieces of the remaining 4 anchovies and push them deep into the dimples. This creates hidden, molten flavor pockets and prevents the cheese from burning during the long bake.

**1. Assemble the sfincione.**

Ladle the cooled, thick onion and tomato sauce evenly over the top of the dough. Sprinkle the grated Pecorino Romano over the sauce. Finally, blanket the entire pan with a generous layer of the toasted breadcrumbs. Drizzle the top with one final, light pass of olive oil.

**2. Bake and rest.**

Bake on the middle rack for 35 to 45 minutes. You are looking for the edges of the dough to pull away from the pan and turn a deep, crispy golden brown, while the breadcrumbs form a beautiful, fragrant crust. Remove from the oven and let it rest in the pan for at least 15 minutes. Sfincione is traditionally eaten warm or at room temperature, never piping hot.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Do not insult your ancestors with bad breadcrumbs.**

Sicilians call toasted breadcrumbs 'the cheese of the poor.' Do not use fine, dry breadcrumbs from a cardboard canister. Take a few slices of slightly stale supermarket Italian or sourdough bread, pulse them into coarse crumbs, and toast them yourself. It provides an incredible crunch and acts as a thermal shield, preventing the sauce from drying out in the oven.

● **Embrace the anchovy.**

Do not skip the anchovies in the dimples or the sauce. They melt completely into the hot dough and onions, leaving behind an essential, deep umami flavor rather than a distinctly fishy taste.



# U' Pani chi Panelle al Forno

*oo pah-nee kee pah-nel-leh ahl for-no*

In the ancient, oil-slicked alleys of Palermo's Vucciria market, panellari expertly drop chickpea squares into giant cauldrons, stuffing the golden fritters into soft sesame rolls for hungry locals. For a first-generation kid growing up in the Midwest, the earthy smell of toasted garbanzo flour in the kitchen was a secret signal that a special night was ahead. While purists will always demand the deep fryer, a wise home cook knows that a roaring hot oven and a heavy slick of olive oil can deliver that exact, blistering crunch on a busy Tuesday night. It is the real, authentic flavor of Sicily, brilliantly adapted for the reality of modern life without the mess.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 cup</b>	garbanzo bean flour	<b>1 tsp</b>	fennel seeds <i>lightly crushed</i>
<b>3 cup</b>	cold water	<b>1/4 cup</b>	extra virgin olive oil
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>6 med</b>	soft sesame seed buns
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>	<b>1 med</b>	lemon <i>cut into wedges</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1 pinch</b>	flaky sea salt

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the chilling surface.**

Lightly oil a rimmed half-sheet pan or line it with parchment paper so the hot panelle mixture doesn't stick.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the chickpea flour into cold water off the heat.**

In a heavy-bottomed medium saucepan, combine the cold water, kosher salt, and pepper. Gradually whisk in the flour in a steady stream to ensure absolutely no lumps form. Never add the flour to hot water, or it will seize instantly.

- 2. Cook the mixture over medium heat until it forms a dense, heavy paste.**

Switch to a sturdy wooden spoon and stir continuously, scraping the bottom and sides of the pot. After 10 to 15 minutes, it will suddenly thicken into a stiff paste similar to polenta. Cook vigorously for another 2 to 3 minutes until glossy and pulling cleanly from the sides.

- 3. Fold in the aromatics and spread the hot paste onto a prepared sheet pan.**

Immediately remove from the heat and aggressively stir in the minced parsley and crushed fennel seeds. Working quickly before the starches set, pour the hot paste onto the oiled baking sheet. Use an oiled offset spatula or the back of a wet spoon to spread the mixture into an even, 1/4-inch thick layer.

**1. Chill the chickpea slab until completely firm.**

Allow the pan to cool at room temperature, then transfer it to the refrigerator for at least 30 to 60 minutes. Once solid and cold, use a knife to cut the slab into 3-inch squares.

**2. Bake the squares in a roaring hot oven until blistered and golden.**

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Line a fresh baking sheet with parchment paper, arrange the squares with a little space between them, and generously brush the tops with olive oil. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes until the edges are deeply crispy.

**3. Serve immediately in toasted sesame buns with fresh lemon juice.**

Lightly toast the buns while the panelle bake. Hit the hot fritters with flaky sea salt straight out of the oven. Stack two or three inside a bun, squeeze a generous amount of lemon over the top, close it up, and eat immediately.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

● **Sourcing the right flour is non-negotiable.**

Look for American garbanzo bean flour, like Bob's Red Mill, or imported Italian Farina di Ceci. Explicitly avoid Indian besan or gram flour, which is milled from roasted split chana dal and hydrates differently.

● **Do not skip the sesame seeds.**

If you can't find a true Sicilian mafalda or vastedda roll at a local deli, buy the softest bakery-fresh sesame seed hamburger buns you can find. The toasted nuttiness of the sesame is mandatory for authentic Palermo flavor.

● **The chill step is a built-in weeknight meal prep hack.**

You can cook and spread the chickpea paste up to two days in advance. Leave it covered in the fridge, and you are only 20 minutes of baking away from a hot, comforting meal.



# Cipolline Catanesi

*chee-pohl-LEE-neh kah-tah-NEH-zee*

Walk into a Catanese tavola calda at 8:00 AM, and you'll find locals downing a cappuccino with one hand and a cipollina with the other. To include the undisputed king of eastern Sicilian street food in a chapter named for Palermo borders on provincial treason, but the flavor demands it. Traditional bakeries use a grueling 'half-puff' lard dough, but modern Sicilians and busy American parents share a brilliant secret: high-quality, all-butter puff pastry from the freezer aisle gets you ninety-five percent of the way there. The real magic lies in the slow, sweet, jammy stewing of the onions. Make the filling on a Sunday, and the smell of a Sicilian bakery fills an Ohio kitchen on a busy Tuesday in under thirty minutes.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>14 oz</b>	all-butter puff pastry <i>thawed in the refrigerator</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	sugar
<b>3 tbsp</b>	extra-virgin olive oil	<b>4 oz</b>	deli ham <i>unsmoked, sliced medium-thin</i>
<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	Vidalia onions <i>halved and sliced very thin</i>	<b>5 oz</b>	low-moisture whole milk  mozzarella <i>cut into small cubes</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 large</b>	egg <i>beaten with 1 tbsp milk</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	tomato puree		
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper		

## PREPARATION

- **Make the onion jam ahead of time.**

Making the filling a day ahead and chilling it guarantees your puff pastry won't melt during assembly, ensuring a flakier crust and an even faster weeknight meal.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sweat the onions into submission.**

Heat the olive oil in a wide skillet over medium-low heat. Add the sliced onions and salt, cooking very slowly for about 20 minutes until they completely collapse and turn translucent. Do not let them brown; they must surrender and become sweet and jammy.

- 2. Restrict the moisture.**

Stir in the tomato puree, black pepper, and sugar. Cook for another 5 minutes until the mixture is dense and the liquid has evaporated. Remove from heat and cool completely so it doesn't melt the pastry later.

- 3. Prepare the puff pastry.**

Preheat the oven to 400°F and line a large sheet pan with parchment paper. Unroll the chilled puff pastry sheets and cut each into four equal squares.

**1. Assemble the parcels.**

Working one square at a time, place a folded slice of ham in the center. Top with a generous tablespoon of the cooled onion jam, then a small handful of the cubed mozzarella.

**2. Execute the handkerchief fold.**

Pull one corner of the pastry over the filling and brush the tip with a little egg wash. Pull the opposite corner to the center to overlap and seal. Repeat with the remaining corners to form a sealed packet.

**3. Reinforce with the Catanese toothpick trick.**

To prevent the pastry from bursting open and spilling its filling during the bake, insert a standard wooden toothpick straight down through the center where the four corners meet.

**4. Bake until shatteringly crisp.**

Transfer the parcels to the sheet pan, brush generously with the remaining egg wash, and bake for 20 to 25 minutes until puffed and deeply golden brown.

**5. Rest before serving.**

Remove the toothpicks immediately upon exiting the oven. Let them rest for at least 10 minutes; molten cheese and onions demand respect, and a true cipollina is best enjoyed warm rather than boiling hot.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The true pastry is a mezza sfogliatura.**

Traditional bakeries laminate a yeasted, lard-enriched dough like croissants. It's a labor of love for a lazy Sunday, but high-quality puff pastry is the universally accepted weeknight shortcut.

● **Beware the soggy bottom.**

Native Sicilians warn against l'acquetta (the little water). Use dry mozzarella instead of fresh, and ensure your onions are cooked down until dense so steam doesn't blow out your pastry seams.



# Arancini Scomposti al Forno

*ah-rah-n-CHEE-nee skohm-POH-stee ahl FOR-noh*

There's a profound romance to the Palermo street-side arancina, but standing over a pot of sputtering oil on a Tuesday in Ohio is a fast track to madness. This is the pragmatic, deeply authentic workaround deployed by Sicilian grandmothers for generations: the sformato. By pressing saffron-laced rice into a heavily breadcrumbed pan and burying a dense, creamy core of meat, peas, and cheese within, the oven does the agonizing work of deep-frying for you. It yields the exact crunch, the molten center, and the heady aroma of the old world, engineered perfectly for a busy American kitchen.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter <i>softened</i>	<b>3/4 lb</b>	lean ground beef
<b>3/4 cup</b>	plain fine breadcrumbs	<b>1/4 cup</b>	dry white wine
<b>4 cup</b>	low-sodium chicken broth	<b>1 cup</b>	tomato puree
<b>1 pinch</b>	saffron threads	<b>3/4 cup</b>	frozen petite peas <i>thawed slightly</i>
<b>2 cup</b>	Arborio rice	<b>1 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter
<b>3 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter	<b>1 tbsp</b>	all-purpose flour
<b>1/2 cup</b>	Pecorino Romano cheese <i>grated</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	whole milk
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 pinch</b>	ground nutmeg
<b>1 tbsp</b>	extra-virgin olive oil	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	low-moisture whole-milk mozzarella cheese <i>shredded</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	sharp provolone cheese <i>grated</i>
<b>1 med</b>	carrot <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	extra-virgin olive oil <i>reserved for brushing</i>
<b>1 med</b>	celery stalk <i>finely minced</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Make the quick besciamella.**

Melt 1 tablespoon of butter in a small saucepan over medium heat, whisk in the flour, and cook for one minute. Slowly whisk in the milk and a pinch of nutmeg, simmering until thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, then set aside.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Simmer the ragù until it is profoundly thick.**

Heat the olive oil in a skillet over medium heat, sautéing the onion, carrot, and celery until soft. Break the ground beef into the pan, browning it deeply before deglazing with the wine. Once the liquid evaporates, stir in the tomato puree, frozen peas, salt, and pepper, letting it simmer on low for 20 minutes until the sauce clings tightly to the meat.

### 2. **Fold the besciamella into the meat.**

Remove the thickened ragù from the heat and stir the prepared besciamella directly into it, creating a luxurious, creamy filling that mimics the molten center of a street-shop arancina.

### 3. **Bloom the saffron and cook the rice.**

Bring the chicken broth to a gentle simmer, ladling a few tablespoons into a small cup to steep the saffron threads until the liquid turns a fiery orange. Add the Arborio rice and the saffron liquid to the simmering broth, lower the heat, cover, and cook for 15 to 18 minutes until the liquid is entirely absorbed.

### 4. **Whip the rice to release its starches.**

Off the heat, vigorously stir in 3 tablespoons of butter, the grated Pecorino, and the salt. This aggressive stirring binds the rice so it holds its shape; spread it onto a baking sheet to cool slightly so you can handle it.

### 5. **Engineer the crispy shell.**

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Smear 2 tablespoons of softened butter heavily across the bottom and sides of a 9x13-inch baking dish, then pour in the breadcrumbs, tilting the pan to coat every square inch before tapping out the excess.

**1. Assemble the casserole.**

With slightly wet hands, press exactly half of the cooled saffron rice evenly into the bottom of the breadcrumb-dusted pan. Spread the creamy meat mixture over the rice, leaving a half-inch border, scatter the mozzarella and provolone on top, and seal the filling completely by gently pressing the remaining rice over the cheese like a patchwork quilt.

**2. Bake to a deep golden brown.**

Brush the top layer of rice lightly with olive oil, dust generously with the remaining breadcrumbs, and bake uncovered for 25 to 30 minutes. Let the casserole rest on the counter for at least 15 minutes before slicing, allowing the molten cheese to settle and the starches to firm up into clean, distinct layers.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Do not substitute the saffron for turmeric.**

While turmeric will give you the requisite yellow hue, its earthy bitterness completely alters the nostalgic, floral profile of an authentic Palermo arancina.

● **The breadcrumb crust is non-negotiable.**

Heavy butter and plain, fine breadcrumbs are the mechanical secret to getting a deep-fried texture from a baking pan. Do not use seasoned crumbs or coarse panko.



# Scacciata Catanese Veloce

*skah-CHAH-tah kah-tah-NAY-zay veh-LOH-chay*

While this chapter celebrates Palermo, this magnificent, unapologetic beast of a sheet-pan pie comes from its fierce rival on the eastern coast: Catania. The old-school scacciata was born of pure frugality, a way for grandmothers to stretch the last scraps of bread dough over whatever the garden and the local cheesemaker had lying around. Traditional dough demands hours of waiting, but modern Italian home cooks have a secret for a busy Tuesday night: instant baking powder mixed with a little semolina for that golden, old-world crunch. Stuffed with sausage, broccoli, and a provolone blend that perfectly mimics Sicily's elusive, unaged Tuma cheese, this is a massive, crispy, double-crust monument to working-class ingenuity.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 cup</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>1 med</b>	broccoli
<b>1 cup</b>	semolina flour	<b>head</b>	<i>cut into very small bite-sized florets</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	baking powder	<b>2 med</b>	garlic
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>clove</b>	<i>minced</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	sugar	<b>12 oz</b>	mild provolone cheese
<b>1/3 cup</b>	extra virgin olive oil		<i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>3/4 cup</b>	warm water	<b>8 oz</b>	low-moisture whole milk
<b>2 tbsp</b>	extra virgin olive oil		mozzarella
<b>1 lb</b>	mild Italian ground sausage	<b>1/3 cup</b>	<i>shredded</i>
	<i>casings removed</i>		pitted black olives
		<b>3 med</b>	<i>halved</i>
		<b>1 tsp</b>	scallions
			<i>thinly sliced</i>
			black pepper
			<i>freshly ground</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Preheat your oven to 400°F.**

Generously grease a 13x9-inch rimmed baking sheet or large round pizza pan with olive oil.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Brown the sausage in a large skillet over medium-high heat.**

Heat a splash of olive oil and cook the sausage for 5 to 7 minutes, crumbling it with a wooden spoon until cooked through. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the meat to a paper towel-lined plate, leaving the flavorful fat in the pan.

- 2. Sauté the garlic and broccoli in the residual sausage fat.**

Cook for 4 to 5 minutes until bright green and slightly tender. If the pan gets too dry, add a splash of water and cover for 2 minutes to steam, then remove from heat and let cool slightly so it doesn't tear the raw dough later.

**1. Mix the dry dough ingredients in a large bowl.**

Whisk together the all-purpose flour, semolina flour, baking powder, kosher salt, and sugar.

**2. Form the dough by adding olive oil and warm water to the dry mix.**

Make a well in the center, pour in the 1/3 cup of olive oil and the warm water, and stir until a shaggy dough forms. Knead on a lightly floured surface for 3 to 4 minutes until smooth and slightly tacky, adding a few drops of water if it feels too dry. Because we are using baking powder, there is no need to let it rise.

**3. Divide and roll out the bottom crust.**

Cut the dough into two pieces, making one slightly larger than the other. Roll the larger piece out until it can cover the bottom and slightly hang over the edges of your oiled pan, then transfer it in.

**4. Layer the cheese barrier and the filling.**

Lay down half of the provolone and mozzarella directly on the dough to create a fat barrier that melts into the crust and prevents a soggy bottom. Evenly spread the cooked sausage, broccoli, black olives, and scallions over the top, then finish with the remaining cheese and a very generous grinding of black pepper.

**5. Seal the pie and vent the top.**

Roll out the smaller piece of dough, drape it over the filling, and tightly roll and crimp the overhanging bottom edges over the top crust to seal it securely. Poke a dime-sized hole dead in the center to act as a chimney for escaping steam, prick the rest of the crust with a fork, and brush generously with olive oil.

**6. Bake until deeply golden brown and crisp.**

Bake on the middle rack for 30 to 35 minutes. Let the scacciata rest in the pan for at least 15 to 20 minutes before slicing so the molten cheese can set properly.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Embrace the imperfection.**

Traditional scacciate are fundamentally rustic. If the shape is slightly asymmetrical or if a bit of cheese bubbles out of a tear in the dough, it is perfectly authentic and looks exactly as it should.

- **Seek out semolina flour.**

Using a blend of all-purpose and yellow, coarse semolina flour is the secret to replicating the sun-drenched durum wheat crust of Southern Italy. It yields a distinct crispness that prevents the bottom from getting soggy under the dense filling.

- **Save some for tomorrow.**

Scacciata was practically invented to be eaten the next day. It is the ultimate leftover, easily eaten cold or at room temperature straight from the fridge.



## Cartocciate e Rollò

*car-toh-CHAH-teh eh roh-LOH*

If you grew up in a Sicilian-American house, the smell of slightly sweet dough, melting mozzarella, and savory ham is the ultimate trigger for nostalgia. This is the *rosticceria*—street food grabbed from glass display cases at any hour. Up in Palermo, they wrap this impossibly soft dough around hot dogs for Rollò. Down south in Catania, they stuff it with ham, cheese, and a single black olive for Cartocciate. The grandma secret? Lard and sugar. It sounds strange, but that sweet, rich dough against the salty fillings is the real taste of the homeland. Best of all, you can make the dough the night before and let the fridge do the heavy lifting.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 cup</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>1 cup</b>	low-moisture mozzarella cheese <i>cut into small cubes</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	whole milk <i>warmed to about 105°F</i>	<b>4 oz</b>	deli cooked ham <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>2 1/2 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar	<b>10 med</b>	pitted black olives <i>halved</i>
<b>2 1/4 tsp</b>	instant yeast	<b>5 large</b>	hot dogs
<b>1/4 cup</b>	lard <i>softened to room temperature</i>	<b>1 large</b>	large egg yolk <i>beaten with 1 tbsp of milk</i>
<b>2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>2 tbsp</b>	toasted sesame seeds
<b>1/2 cup</b>	tomato puree		

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Mix the authentic dough.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook, combine the flour, sugar, and yeast. Turn the mixer on low and slowly stream in the warm milk. Once a shaggy dough forms, add the room-temperature lard in small pinches, allowing it to incorporate. Add the salt last, only after the dough has come together, so it doesn't kill the yeast. Knead on medium speed for 8 to 10 minutes until the dough is incredibly smooth, elastic, and pulls away completely from the sides of the bowl.

### 2. Let the dough rise.

Form the dough into a tight ball, place it in a lightly oiled bowl, cover tightly, and let it rise in a warm spot until doubled in size, about 2 hours. If you are doing this on a weeknight, put the covered bowl straight into the fridge to rise slowly overnight, then pull it out 30 minutes before you want to shape it to take the chill off.

**1. Divide and rest the dough.**

Punch down the dough and turn it out onto a very lightly floured surface. Divide it into 10 equal pieces. Roll each piece into a neat ball, cover them with a kitchen towel, and let them rest for 10 minutes to relax the gluten.

**2. Shape the Catanese Cartocciate.**

Take 5 of the dough balls and roll each one into a circle about 1/4-inch thick. Place a scant tablespoon of tomato puree perfectly in the center, then top with a pinch of diced ham, a few cubes of mozzarella, and two olive halves. Fold the dough over into a half-moon shape and aggressively crimp the edges with a fork to completely seal in the filling. Place them on a parchment-lined sheet pan.

**3. Shape the Palermitan Rollò.**

Take the remaining 5 dough balls and roll each against the counter into a long, snake-like rope about 10 inches long. Wind the dough rope continuously around a hot dog from top to bottom, tucking the ends underneath. Gently roll the wrapped hot dog back and forth on the counter to seal the dough to the meat, then place alongside the Cartocciate.

**4. Proof and glaze.**

Cover the sheet pan lightly with a towel and let the shaped breads rise for 30 to 40 minutes until puffy. Preheat your oven to 400°F. Right before baking, generously paint the beaten egg yolk wash over all the pastries, and heavily sprinkle the Rollò with sesame seeds.

**5. Bake to golden perfection.**

Bake on the middle rack for 15 to 20 minutes until you achieve a deep, golden-brown, glossy crust and the cheese inside the Cartocciate is fully melted. Let them cool on the pan for at least 10 minutes before eating out of hand.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **The cold ferment is your best friend.**

Letting the dough rise in the refrigerator for up to 48 hours not only fits perfectly into a busy working parent's schedule, but the slow yeast metabolism actually improves the overall flavor of the dough.

- **Do not use fresh mozzarella.**

Fresh mozzarella packed in water will dump excessive moisture into the Cartocciate, ruining the bake and causing blowouts. Standard low-moisture block mozzarella is exactly what you want here.



# Spiedini "Arrusti e Mangia"

*mahn-jah eh beh-vee*

In the smoke-choked alleys of Palermo's historic markets, *arrusti e mangia*—roast and eat— isn't just a phrase; it's a way of life. The undisputed king of this culture is *mangia e bevi*: fresh scallions wrapped violently tight in unsmoked pork belly, roasted until the fat blisters and the onion melts. In America, we tend to overcomplicate Italian food, but the secret to this profound, old-world flavor is simply good fat, high heat, and elevating the meat on a wire rack to mimic the unforgiving charcoal of a street-side brazier.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>16</b>	large scallions <i>roots and dark green tops trimmed, outermost papery layer peeled</i>	<b>to taste</b>	coarse sea salt
<b>1 lb</b>	thinly sliced raw pork belly	<b>to taste</b>	freshly ground black pepper
		<b>1</b>	large lemon <i>cut into wedges</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Soak the skewers.**

Submerge bamboo skewers in water for 30 minutes so they don't incinerate under the broiler.

- **Preheat the oven.**

Preheat your oven to 400°F (200°C) and line a rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil for easy cleanup.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Trim and halve the scallions.**

Cut the firm white and light-green stalks into four-inch pieces, halving them lengthwise if they are thicker than your thumb so they cook evenly.

- 2. Wrap the scallions in pork belly.**

Lay a slice of pork flat, season aggressively with salt and pepper, and wrap it around a scallion on a tight diagonal. Wrap it as tightly as physically possible so the meat binds to the onion as it shrinks.

- 3. Skewer the rolls.**

Thread the wrapped scallions onto the soaked bamboo skewers, placing two or three on each skewer for easier handling.

**1. Set up the sheet pan.**

Set a wire cooling rack inside the prepared baking sheet. Elevating the meat allows hot air to circulate and excess fat to drip away, preventing it from boiling in its own grease.

**2. Roast the skewers.**

Roast in the center of the oven for 15 to 18 minutes until the pork renders and turns golden, and the scallions soften.

**3. Broil to finish.**

Switch the oven to broil for 2 to 3 minutes, watching like a hawk until the edges of the pork blister and the exposed scallions catch a dark, street-cart char.

**4. Serve screaming hot.**

Pull them from the oven and serve immediately. Hit them with a heavy squeeze of fresh lemon juice—the acid cuts perfectly through the rich, salty pork fat.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Source raw, uncured pork belly.**

Do not use standard American smoked bacon or cured Italian pancetta. The salt and smoke will completely ruin the delicate flavor of the dish. Thin-sliced raw pork belly is easily found at Asian markets or by asking a butcher for uncured side pork.



# Cazzilli / Crochè di Patate al Forno

*cah-TZEEL-lee pah-lair-mee-TAH-nee*

In Palermo, street food isn't just a snack; it's an institution. The cazzillo—a humble potato croquette historically fried up on a three-wheeled Piaggio cart—is a masterclass in restraint. There's no egg, no cheese, and no breadcrumb armor to hide behind. It relies entirely on the natural starches of old potatoes and the brutal heat of the pan. Stripping away the deep fryer for a blazing hot sheet pan keeps the spirit of the street cart intact, making it possible to recreate that blistered, golden crust and creamy, mint-flecked center on a busy Tuesday night in Ohio.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	Russet potatoes <i>scrubbed clean, skins left on</i>	<b>1 small clove</b>	garlic <i>minced extremely fine</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh mint or flat-leaf parsley leaves <i>finely chopped</i>	<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	Kosher salt
<b>1 tbsp</b>	potato starch or cornstarch	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
		<b>1/4 cup</b>	extra-virgin olive oil

## PREPARATION

- **Line a small baking sheet or tray with parchment paper.**  
You will use this to hold the shaped croquettes while they rest in the refrigerator.
- **Clear a flat space in your refrigerator.**  
The croquettes must chill completely uncovered to dry out their exterior.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Cook the potatoes completely dry.**  
To prevent the croquettes from exploding in the pan later, water is the absolute enemy. Pierce the whole potatoes a few times with a fork and microwave them on high until completely tender, about 10 to 15 minutes, or bake them in a 400°F oven for an hour.
- 2. Rice the potatoes while they are still hot.**  
Slice the hot potatoes in half and press the flesh through a potato ricer into a large bowl, discarding the skins left behind. A ricer is critical here; a standard masher leaves lumps that will compromise the structural integrity of the croquettes.
- 3. Season and bind the dough.**  
Add the chopped mint, garlic, salt, pepper, and starch to the warm riced potatoes. Gently fold the mixture together with your hands or a spatula just until it forms a cohesive dough, being very careful not to overwork it into a gummy paste.

**1. Shape the cazzilli.**

Lightly oil your hands, scoop up a generous tablespoon of the potato mixture, and roll it between your palms to form a smooth oval log about 3 inches long and 1 inch thick. Place the formed croquettes onto the parchment-lined tray.

**2. Chill the croquettes thoroughly.**

Place the tray uncovered in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours, or ideally overnight. This is the ultimate grandma trick: the resting period locks the starches together and creates a protective skin that holds the potato together when the heat hits.

**3. Fry on a blazing hot sheet pan.**

Preheat the oven to 425°F with a heavy, rimmed baking sheet inside. Once blazing hot, carefully remove the pan, pour in the olive oil to coat the bottom, and quickly arrange the chilled cazzilli in the oil. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, carefully rolling them over halfway through, until deeply golden and blistered all over.

**4. Drain and serve immediately.**

Transfer the hot croquettes to a paper-towel-lined plate to drain briefly, hit them with a final pinch of salt, and serve hot while the outside is still dangerously crisp.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The beauty of restraint.**

Resist the urge to add cheese, egg, or breadcrumbs to the mixture. Traditional Palermitan cazzilli are celebrated precisely for their bare, unbreaded potato-and-herb profile, relying entirely on technique for their crunch.

● **Mint over parsley.**

While flat-leaf parsley is perfectly acceptable and widely used, fresh mint is deeply traditional in Palermo. It cuts through the heavy starch and fat with a bright, aromatic lift that immediately transports the palate to a bustling Sicilian market.





# The Sunday Simmer: Sicilian-American Meatball Rituals

*Dedicated to the slow-cooked, meat-heavy sauces that immigrants developed to celebrate newfound prosperity, designed for Sunday afternoons.*

Back in the old country, meat was a someday thing—a luxury reserved for feast days and the fortunate. But in America, the new arrivals looked at the abundant butcher cases and declared every Sunday a celebration. The Sunday pot became a bubbling, house-perfuming testament to survival. It started early

in the morning: the hiss of garlic hitting hot oil, the aggressive sear of pork and beef, the slow, rhythmic blip of crushed tomatoes reducing into something profound.

This is the blueprint for that unapologetic, heavy-hitting abundance. It's the slow-cooked sugo that permanently stains the wooden spoon, the tender, garlic-laced meatballs rolled by hand, a towering, crusty tray of baked ziti, and the bitter dark greens necessary to cut through the fat. It's food that demands your time, meant to be eaten elbow-to-elbow until nobody can breathe. The payoff is a kitchen that smells exactly like home.





# Sugo Veloce di Salsiccia

*SOO-go veh-LO-chey dee sahl-SEE-chah*

A true Sunday meat ragù is a labor of love that commands the stove for hours, but what about a Tuesday night when the family is hungry and time is short? The women of Sicily relied on this brilliantly unpretentious, lightning-fast sauce born of practical magic. Because traditional pork sausage is already cured and packed with fat and spice, it does the heavy lifting for you. First-generation immigrants couldn't forage for the wild fennel that grew on their homeland's hills, so they adapted, crushing dried seeds to recreate those intoxicating, nostalgic smells. It skips the fake Hollywood "Italian Seasoning" and goes straight to the authentic source: good pork fat, a simple onion, a splash of wine, and velvety tomatoes.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 tbsp</b>	extra-virgin olive oil	<b>2 tbsp</b>	double-concentrated tomato paste
<b>1 med</b>	yellow onion <i>minced very finely</i>	<b>24 oz</b>	tomato passata
<b>1 lb</b>	mild Italian pork sausage <i>casings removed</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	water
<b>1 tsp</b>	whole fennel seeds <i>lightly crushed</i>	<b>1 lb</b>	short sturdy pasta
<b>1/2 cup</b>	dry red or white wine	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh basil leaves <i>torn</i>
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	Pecorino Romano <i>grated</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Make-ahead magic.**

This sauce tastes even better the next day, cooling into a thick, concentrated flavor bomb that keeps in the fridge for up to four days.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sauté the onion gently in olive oil.**

Heat the olive oil in a wide, heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat, add the minced onion with a pinch of salt, and cook until soft and translucent, about 5 minutes.

- 2. Crumble the sausage meat entirely.**

Drop the bare sausage into the pot and immediately attack it with a wooden spoon. You want to mash and chop the meat relentlessly into a fine, granular crumble—a technique called *sgranare*—so the fat melts directly into the onions.

- 3. Bloom the fennel seeds in the pork fat.**

Once the meat loses its pink color, sprinkle in the crushed fennel seeds and let the sausage brown deeply, releasing that unmistakable sweet anise aroma.

**1. Deglaze the pot with wine.**

Pour in the wine, scraping up the browned bits from the bottom, and let it bubble aggressively until the sharp alcohol smell evaporates.

**2. Fry the tomato paste.**

Clear a small space in the center, add the tomato paste to fry for sixty seconds until slightly darkened, then stir it into the meat.

**3. Simmer the tomatoes gently.**

Pour in the passata, rinse the bottle with the water and add that too, then reduce the heat to the lowest setting to let the sauce barely bubble (pippiare) for 30 to 40 minutes.

**4. Dress the pasta and serve.**

Toss hot, al dente pasta directly into the pot with the sauce over low heat for one minute before serving with fresh basil and Pecorino Romano.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Fennel Hack.**

Crushing whole fennel seeds under the flat side of a chef's knife before cooking perfectly replicates the elusive, nostalgic aroma of Sicilian wild fennel.

● **Skip the Sugar.**

Mid-century recipes often relied on sugar to mask cheap canned tomatoes. High-quality passata and fried tomato paste build natural sweetness, rendering sugar completely unnecessary.



# Polpette Siciliane al Forno

*pol-PET-teh see-chee-lee-AH-neh ahl FOR-noh*

If you want to understand a Sicilian family, look at their meatballs. In America, we grew accustomed to baseball-sized monstrosities made heavy with ricotta and sandy breadcrumbs from a cardboard can. But true purpetti are an exercise in delicate balance, a testament to the island's history: the savory heft of fresh meat, the sharp bite of sheep's cheese, and the unmistakable Moorish sweetness of pine nuts and plump currants. We skip the messy frying and bake them hard and fast for a busy weeknight, but we keep the two non-negotiable secrets of a Catanese nonna: a wet bread panade for an impossibly soft crumb, and a splash of Marsala wine to make you close your eyes and know exactly where you belong.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 cup</b>	rustic white bread <i>crusts removed, torn into 1-inch pieces</i>	<b>1/3 cup</b>	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	whole milk	<b>2 clove</b>	garlic <i>grated or finely minced</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	80/20 ground beef	<b>1 tbsp</b>	sweet Marsala wine
<b>1/2 lb</b>	ground pork	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground cinnamon
<b>2 large</b>	large eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 cup</b>	Pecorino Romano cheese <i>finely grated</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>1/3 cup</b>	dark raisins or Zante currants	<b>2 tbsp</b>	olive oil
<b>1/4 cup</b>	pine nuts <i>lightly toasted</i>	<b>4 cup</b>	marinara sauce

## PREPARATION

- **Plump the raisins.**

Place the raisins in a small bowl and cover them with hot tap water. Let them soak for 10 minutes, then drain well. This ensures they don't draw moisture out of the meat while baking.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Make the panade.**

In a large bowl, combine the torn bread pieces and the milk. Toss to coat and let it sit for 5 minutes. Using your hands, aggressively mash the bread until it forms a wet, cohesive paste. This gelatinized starch is the true old-world trick for a meatball that melts in your mouth.

- 2. Build the mix.**

To the bowl with the panade, add the ground beef, ground pork, beaten eggs, grated Pecorino, drained raisins, pine nuts, parsley, garlic, Marsala wine, cinnamon, salt, and pepper.

**1. Mix gently.**

Using your hands, mix until just combined. Overworking the meat causes the proteins to bind too tightly, resulting in a tough meatball. The mixture should feel light and slightly tacky.

**2. Form and bake.**

Preheat your oven to 400°F. Line a heavy rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper and brush lightly with olive oil. Wet your hands with a little cold water to prevent sticking and roll the mixture into golf-ball-sized portions. Bake for 15 to 18 minutes until a golden-brown crust forms on the outside.

**3. The final simmer.**

While the meatballs bake, warm your marinara sauce in a wide, shallow pot over medium-low heat. Transfer the hot meatballs directly from the oven into the gently bubbling sauce. Let them simmer together for 10 minutes to absorb the acidity of the tomatoes and finish cooking.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Marsala secret.**

Adding exactly one tablespoon of Marsala wine to the raw meat mixture is a traditional Catanese technique. The alcohol cooks off, but the fortified wine neutralizes the sulfurous flavor of the raw egg binder and adds a profound, aged depth.



# Spiedini di Carne alla Siciliana

*spee-eh-DEE-nee dee CAR-neh ahl SOO-go*

There is no fake Hollywood nostalgia here, just a brilliant bit of working-class kitchen alchemy. Sicilian grandmothers knew exactly how to stretch cheap beef with a rich breadcrumb stuffing studded with raisins and pine nuts—the enduring fingerprints of Arab Sicily. Skewered tight with bay leaves and left to braise in the Sunday pot, these rolls transform into meltingly tender bundles that completely perfume the tomato sauce. It gives you a rich gravy for your pasta and a flawless main course in one pot, exactly as it was meant to be.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	plain Panko breadcrumbs	<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	raisins <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	beef top round <i>sliced very thin</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	pine nuts <i>lightly toasted</i>	<b>1 large</b>	red onion <i>cut into 1-inch squares</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	sharp Provolone cheese <i>grated</i>	<b>14 med</b>	dried bay leaves
<b>1/4 cup</b>	Pecorino Romano cheese <i>grated</i>	<b>3 clove</b>	garlic <i>smashed</i>
<b>1 small</b>	yellow onion <i>finely minced</i>	<b>28 oz</b>	crushed tomatoes
<b>1 tbsp</b>	tomato paste	<b>1/2 cup</b>	water
<b>6 tbsp</b>	extra-virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	<b>6 med</b>	wooden skewers

## PREPARATION

- **Soak the dried ingredients.**

Submerge the chopped raisins, dried bay leaves, and wooden skewers in warm water for at least 10 minutes before starting.

- **Pound the beef.**

If your butcher didn't slice the beef carpaccio-thin, place the slices between plastic wrap and gently pound them to a quarter-inch thickness.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sauté the aromatics.**

In a small skillet, cook the minced yellow onion in a splash of olive oil until soft, then stir in the tomato paste for one minute to darken.

**1. Mix the filling.**

In a bowl, combine the breadcrumbs, soaked raisins, pine nuts, cheeses, parsley, and sautéed onion. Drizzle in a quarter cup of the olive oil and mix until it holds together like wet sand.

**2. Stuff and roll the beef.**

Season the beef lightly with salt. Place a tablespoon of filling in the center of each slice, fold the long edges inward, and roll tightly from the bottom like a small burrito.

**3. Assemble the skewers.**

Thread a red onion square, a soaked bay leaf, and a meat roll—pierced through the seam to hold it shut—onto the skewers. Repeat to fit three rolls per skewer, capping the end with a final bay leaf and onion.

**4. Sear the meat.**

Heat two tablespoons of olive oil in a heavy Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Brown the skewers on all sides to build a savory crust and toast the bay leaves, then remove to a plate.

**5. Build the sauce.**

Lower the heat to medium and fry the smashed garlic in the residual beef fat for one minute. Pour in the crushed tomatoes and water, and season lightly with salt.

**6. Start the Sunday simmer.**

Submerge the browned skewers in the sauce. Cover and gently simmer on low for 45 to 60 minutes, until the beef yields and the gravy is richly perfumed.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Manage the filling moisture.**

If the breadcrumb mixture feels like dry dust, add a teaspoon of warm water until it binds. It shouldn't steal moisture from the meat as it cooks.

- **Dress the pasta.**

The resulting tomato sauce is meant to dress a platter of rigatoni or spaghetti as your first course, with the tender skewers served immediately after.



## Ziti al Forno "Senza Bollitura"

*zee-tee ahl for-no sen-tsa bol-lee-too-rah*

The Southern Italian matriarchs didn't skip boiling the pasta because they were lazy; they did it because they were smart. The a crudo method, or *sciùè sciùè* (quick and simple), means dumping dry ziti straight into a heavily thinned sauce. As the pasta hydrates in the oven, it releases its starch directly into the liquid, binding it all together into a velvety, cohesive masterpiece that a pot of pre-boiled noodles could never achieve. Tucking raw, tiny meatballs—*polpettine*—into the mix saves a skillet and flavors the whole damn thing from the inside out. It's an old-world weeknight trick that tastes exactly like a Sunday afternoon in Sicily.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 lb</b>	80/20 ground beef chuck	<b>1 lb</b>	ziti <i>dry, uncooked</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	ground pork	<b>28 oz</b>	marinara sauce <i>high-quality, jarred</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	Italian seasoned breadcrumbs	<b>2 cup</b>	water <i>cold</i>
<b>1/3 cup</b>	Pecorino Romano <i>grated</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	whole milk ricotta cheese
<b>1 large</b>	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>	<b>8 oz</b>	sharp provolone <i>cut into 1/4-inch cubes</i>
<b>1 med clove</b>	garlic <i>finely grated</i>	<b>8 oz</b>	whole milk low-moisture mozzarella <i>shredded</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh parsley <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Pecorino Romano <i>grated</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh basil leaves <i>torn</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Form the polpettine.**

In a mixing bowl, combine the ground beef, ground pork, breadcrumbs, 1/3 cup of grated Pecorino, egg, garlic, parsley, salt, and pepper. Gently mix with your hands just until combined, then form into tiny meatballs about the size of a cherry tomato.

- **Thin out the marinara.**

In a large bowl, whisk together the jarred marinara sauce and the cold water until the mixture looks alarmingly thin.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Preheat the oven and prepare the baking dish.**

Set the oven to 400°F and lightly oil a 9×13-inch ceramic or glass baking dish.

**1. Build the foundation of the casserole.**

Pour about one cup of the thinned sauce into the bottom of the dish, then scatter the completely dry, uncooked ziti evenly over the sauce.

**2. Nestle the meatballs and drown the pasta.**

Tuck the raw meatballs evenly among the dry noodles, then pour the remaining thinned tomato sauce over the top to ensure every single noodle is completely submerged.

**3. Layer the cheeses.**

Scatter the cubed provolone and dollop small spoonfuls of ricotta evenly across the dish, then sprinkle with half of the shredded mozzarella and half of the remaining grated Pecorino.

**4. Seal the dish and bake.**

Cover the baking dish tightly with heavy-duty aluminum foil, crimping the edges completely shut to trap the steam, and bake on the center rack for 40 to 45 minutes.

**5. Uncover for the Maillard finish.**

Carefully remove the foil, top with the remaining mozzarella and Pecorino, and return to the oven uncovered for 10 to 15 minutes until the cheese is deeply melted, bubbling, and golden brown on the edges.

**6. Rest the casserole before serving.**

Remove from the oven and let it sit for at least 10 to 15 minutes to allow the starches to set and the liquid to be fully absorbed, then garnish with the torn fresh basil.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The cubed cheese is a deliberate upgrade.**

Using cubed provolone instead of pre-shredded cheese ensures it melts into luxurious, distinct pockets of stretch rather than disappearing entirely into the hot sauce.

- **Trust the thin sauce.**

The sauce must be heavily diluted with water to hydrate the raw pasta properly; the pasta will release its starches as it cooks, binding everything into a perfectly thick, cohesive dish.



# Involtini di Pollo alla Palermitana

*een-vohl-TEE-nee dee POHL-loh AH-lah pah-lehr-mee-TAH-nah*

If you grew up in a Sicilian-American house, you probably knew these as "braciolo"—little bundles of meat simmering away in the Sunday gravy. But take a trip back to the chaotic, vibrant markets of Palermo, and you'll find them called involtini. This is western Sicily on a plate, a love letter to the island's Arab history where sweet raisins, toasted pine nuts, and sharp cheese are rolled up and braised in a quick tomato sauce. It's the undeniable, magical flavor of a Sunday afternoon, engineered to actually work on a busy Tuesday night.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/4 cup</b>	dark raisins <i>soaked in warm water for 10 minutes and drained</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	tomato paste
<b>5 tbsp</b>	olive oil <i>divided</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>chopped</i>
<b>1 small</b>	yellow onion <i>very finely minced</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	plain unseasoned breadcrumbs <i>divided</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	freshly ground black pepper
<b>1/4 cup</b>	pine nuts <i>lightly toasted</i>	<b>4 large</b>	boneless skinless chicken breasts
<b>1/2 cup</b>	Pecorino Romano or sharp Provolone cheese <i>grated</i>	<b>1 large</b>	red onion <i>cut into 1-inch petals</i>
		<b>10 med</b>	fresh bay leaves
		<b>1 qt</b>	simple tomato sauce

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Toast the breadcrumbs for the filling.**

Keep simple things simple: toasting the breadcrumbs is the trick to authentic Sicilian involtini, preventing the filling from turning into a gummy paste. Heat 3 tablespoons of the olive oil in a skillet over medium heat, sauté the minced yellow onion until soft, and then stir in 1 cup of the breadcrumbs until they absorb the oil and take on a golden, toasted color.

### 2. **Mix the Palermitana filling.**

Remove the pan from the heat and transfer the toasted breadcrumbs to a mixing bowl to cool slightly. Stir in the plumped raisins, toasted pine nuts, grated cheese, parsley, and tomato paste until the mixture looks and feels like damp sand. The tomato paste is the grandmother's secret here—it binds the sweet and savory ingredients and keeps the interior beautifully moist.

**1. Pound the chicken into cutlets.**

Slice each chicken breast horizontally right through the middle to create two thinner cutlets. Place them one at a time between two sheets of plastic wrap and pound gently but firmly with a meat mallet until they are uniformly thin—about 1/4-inch thick.

**2. Roll and secure the involtini.**

Lay a pounded chicken cutlet flat and place about 2 tablespoons of the breadcrumb filling on the wider end. Fold the long sides in slightly over the filling, roll the chicken up tightly like a burrito, and secure the seam with a toothpick so the stuffing won't spill out into your sauce.

**3. Coat and sear the chicken.**

Lightly brush the outside of the rolled chicken with the remaining olive oil, then roll them in the remaining 1/2 cup of plain breadcrumbs just to coat. In a large, wide braising pan or Dutch oven, sear the rolls over medium-high heat for about 2 minutes per side until the breadcrumb coating turns a deep golden brown.

**4. Execute the Sunday simmer.**

Pour your tomato sauce directly over the seared chicken rolls and tuck the red onion petals and bay leaves into the sauce between the meat. Lower the heat to a gentle simmer, cover the pot, and cook for 15 to 20 minutes; the bay leaf and onion will release their aromatic oils directly into the incredibly tender meat.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Authentic Spitini Touch**

If you want to serve these the way they do in the markets of Palermo, thread a petal of red onion, a bay leaf, and an involtini roll onto a long wooden skewer before searing, repeating the pattern. It's a spectacular presentation that locks the aromatics right against the meat.



# Melanzane Ripiene in Padella

*meh-lahn-ZAH-neh ree-PYEH-neh een pah-DELL-ah*

There is no baking here. The grandmothers of the Sicilian diaspora didn't turn on their ovens in the suffocating heat of a Midwest summer, and they certainly didn't disrespect good meat by boiling it raw in tomato sauce. They treated the hollowed-out eggplant like a prime cut—searing the meatball stuffing face-down in hot oil to build a deeply savory crust, then letting the whole glorious mess simmer slowly in a skillet of crushed tomatoes. It is a masterclass in working-class ingenuity, using ordinary supermarket ingredients and simple stovetop mechanics to recreate the exact, undeniable taste of home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 small</b>	Italian eggplants <i>washed and halved lengthwise with stems intact</i>	<b>1 med clove</b>	garlic <i>smashed</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	ground beef	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	ground pork	<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh mint <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	fresh breadcrumbs <i>soaked in a splash of milk and squeezed dry</i>	<b>1 large</b>	large egg <i>lightly beaten</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	pecorino romano <i>grated</i>	<b>24 oz</b>	tomato passata
<b>1/2 cup</b>	sharp provolone <i>diced</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	extra virgin olive oil
<b>3 med cloves</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh basil <i>torn</i>
		<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
		<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Gather and measure all sauce ingredients before turning on the stove.**

The transition from searing the meat to simmering the sauce moves quickly; have your passata, smashed garlic, and fresh basil ready by the burner.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Hollow out the eggplants to create quarter-inch thick boats.**

Use a spoon to scrape out the center flesh, being careful not to puncture the skin. Finely chop this extracted core and save it; folding it into the meatball mix is the working-class secret to a soft, yielding bite.

**1. Mix the meatball stuffing gently by hand.**

In a large bowl, combine the beef, pork, milk-soaked breadcrumbs, chopped eggplant core, minced garlic, parsley, mint, pecorino, provolone, and the egg. Season aggressively with salt and pepper, mixing just until incorporated so the meat remains tender.

**2. Pack the meat mixture securely into the eggplant cavities.**

Wipe the hollowed eggplants completely dry, then mound the stuffing into each boat. Press gently so the filling sits tight and crests just slightly above the rim.

**3. Sear the stuffed eggplants meat-side down in hot oil.**

This is non-negotiable. Coat the bottom of a wide, heavy-bottomed skillet with olive oil over medium-high heat. Lay the eggplants stuffing-side down and leave them entirely alone for five minutes until a deep, dark crust forms, then carefully flip them onto their skins.

**4. Simmer the eggplants in the tomato sauce until thoroughly tender.**

Lower the heat to medium-low, drop the smashed garlic clove into the oil, and pour the tomato passata around—never over—the eggplants. Swish a splash of water in the empty passata bottle, add it to the pan with a pinch of salt and the torn basil, cover tightly, and simmer for 40 minutes.

**5. Let the skillet rest off the heat before serving.**

Pull the pan from the stove and walk away for at least fifteen minutes. The stuffing needs to set and the savory meat juices need time to bleed into the tomato sauce.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Skip the traditional salt purge.**

Modern American supermarket eggplants have the bitter vegetative liquid bred entirely out of them. Save yourself thirty minutes on a weeknight and go straight to hollowing and stuffing.

- **Do not skip the stovetop sear.**

Boiling raw meatball mixture directly in tomato sauce leaks proteins, leading to rubbery stuffing and a cloudy sauce. The aggressive sear is what gives this dish its deep, savory backbone.

- **Use fresh mint, or leave it out completely.**

A pinch of mint is the hallmark of Sicilian flavor. If you can't find it fresh, do not substitute dried mint—which tastes overwhelmingly medicinal—just lean entirely on the parsley and basil.



# Verdure Amare con Uvetta e Pinoli

*vehr-DOO-reh ah-MAH-reh kohn oo-VEHT-tah eh pee-NOH-lee*

If Sunday sauce is the heavy, meat-laden king of the Italian-American weekend, this dish is its saving grace. Back in the old country, grandmothers foraged the slopes of Mount Etna for wild, aggressively bitter weeds. When they arrived in America, they adapted without compromising, turning to the abundant and slightly sweeter heads of escarole found in neighborhood markets. This relies on an ancient Arab-Sicilian agrodolce—sweet and sour—to cut right through the fat of your sausages. Plump raisins, buttery pine nuts, and a stealthy backbone of melted anchovy transform a humble head of lettuce into the thing you'll end up eating straight out of the pan.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/3 cup</b>	golden raisins	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	crushed red pepper flakes
<b>3 tbsp</b>	pine nuts	<b>4 small</b>	anchovy fillets packed in oil
<b>2 large</b>	escarole <i>root ends discarded, chopped into 2-inch ribbons</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	capers <i>rinsed</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	extra-virgin olive oil	<b>1/4 cup</b>	black olives <i>pitted and roughly chopped</i>
<b>3 large</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled and smashed</i>	<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt
		<b>1 pinch</b>	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Plump the raisins.**

Place the raisins in a small bowl, cover them with warm water, and let them soak for 15 minutes before draining well.

- **Wash the greens.**

Drop the chopped escarole into a large basin of cold water, swish vigorously, and let it sit so the sand settles to the bottom.

- **Lift and save the water.**

Use your hands to lift the greens out into a colander, but do not dry them; you need that residual water clinging to the leaves for the braise.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the pine nuts.**

Place a large, dry skillet over medium-low heat, add the pine nuts, and toast until fragrant and golden-brown, about 3 to 5 minutes, then remove them to a plate immediately.

**1. Build the flavor base.**

Wipe out the skillet, set over medium heat, and let the garlic sizzle gently in the olive oil until it turns a light, golden blond.

**2. Melt the anchovies.**

Pull the pan off the heat for 30 seconds so the oil cools slightly, then add the red pepper flakes and anchovies, mashing them into a savory paste with a wooden spoon.

**3. Braise the wet escarole.**

Return the pan to medium-high heat and add the dripping wet escarole a few handfuls at a time, using tongs to turn the rapidly wilting greens in the garlicky oil.

**4. Simmer and marry the flavors.**

Once all the escarole is wilted, fold in the drained raisins, toasted pine nuts, capers, and olives, then reduce the heat to medium-low, partially cover, and simmer for 5 to 8 minutes.

**5. Season and serve.**

Taste for seasoning, adding a pinch of kosher salt and black pepper to balance the sweetness of the raisins, and serve warm alongside your meatballs.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The grandmother secret.**

Do not boil the greens first, and do not spin them dry after washing; the water clinging to the leaves hits the hot oil to create a natural steam that braises the escarole perfectly.

● **Don't waste the leftovers.**

The next day, toss any leftover escarole directly with short pasta like orecchiette or penne, finishing it with a heavy shower of Pecorino Romano cheese.

- **Swap the greens if needed.**

If your market is out of escarole, Swiss chard works flawlessly; simply chop the stems and start cooking them three minutes before adding the leafy greens.



# Hyphenated Holidays: Sicilian-American Gatherings

*Showcasing how first-generation Americans approach annual feasts, creating hyphenated traditions that blend American abundance with deep-rooted Sicilian specificities.*

For the first-generation Sicilian-American, the holidays are a beautiful, chaotic collision course. You don't swap the Thanksgiving turkey for ravioli; you stubbornly serve both, eating until everyone at the table is delightfully, irreversibly numb. This isn't the Old Country, and it sure as hell isn't a Norman

Rockwell painting. It's a pragmatic compromise cooked up in an everyday American kitchen, adapting the sacred feasts of the ancestors to the sprawling aisles of the local supermarket.

What follows is the holiday playbook of the displaced but determined. The Thanksgiving ravioli that reliably makes the bird an afterthought. The architectural heft of a Christmas Eve 'mpanata. The St. Joseph's Day sfingi, pulled hot from the oil and dusted in sugar. This is how a culture survives assimilation: you adapt the ritual, you fiercely protect the flavor, and you feed the people you love.





# Thanksgiving "Ravis" with Quick Sugo Finto

*rah-vee-OH-lee koo oo SOO-koo FEEN-too*

In the Sicilian-American diaspora, no turkey touches the Thanksgiving table until the pasta course has been cleared. For the working-class immigrants who carried these traditions across the Atlantic, recreating a simmering Sunday meat ragù was an expensive luxury, birthing the ingenious 'u sucu fintu—a peasant sauce that relies on caramelized tomato paste and blooming fennel seeds to perfectly mimic the intoxicating aroma of slow-cooked pork sausage. Paired with ricotta and marjoram "ravis" tucked into store-bought pasta sheets, this is a masterpiece of pragmatic culinary deception that yields the exact taste of a grandmother's holiday kitchen without the multi-day labor.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 med</b>	yellow onion <i>finely minced</i>	<b>28 oz</b>	tomato puree
<b>1 large</b>	carrot <i>peeled and finely minced</i>	<b>1 med</b>	bay leaf
<b>1 med</b>	celery <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1 lb</b>	whole milk ricotta <i>drained overnight in a fine-mesh sieve</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	extra virgin olive oil	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Pecorino Romano <i>grated</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	whole fennel seeds <i>lightly crushed</i>	<b>1 large</b>	egg yolk
<b>2 tbsp</b>	double-concentrated tomato paste	<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh marjoram <i>finely chopped</i>
		<b>16 oz</b>	fresh pasta sheets

## PREPARATION

- **Drain the ricotta.**

American supermarket ricotta contains excess whey that must be drained out overnight; skipping this step leaves you with wet ricotta, which turns to steam and causes the ravioli to explode in the boiling water.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the aromatic illusion.**

Heat the olive oil in a heavy-bottomed pot over medium-low heat, then add the minced onion, carrot, celery, and crushed fennel seeds, cooking slowly for 10 to 15 minutes until profoundly soft to release the fat-soluble oils that emulate the smell of cooking sausage.

- 2. Caramelize the tomato paste.**

Clear a space in the center of the vegetables and add the tomato paste, letting it cook for 2 to 3 minutes until it deepens in color to a dark, rust-red to mimic historical sun-dried extract.

**1. Simmer the sugo finto.**

Pour in the tomato puree, add the bay leaf, and rinse the tomato can with a quarter cup of water into the pot; bring to a bubble, then reduce the heat to the lowest setting, partially cover, and simmer for 45 minutes until rich and thick.

**2. Whip the ravioli filling.**

In a mixing bowl, aggressively whip the drained ricotta, egg yolk, Pecorino Romano, and marjoram until entirely smooth and cohesive.

**3. Assemble the ravis.**

Lay out the pasta sheets and drop rounded teaspoons of the ricotta mixture about two inches apart, then lightly brush the dough around the filling with water and drape a second sheet of pasta over the top.

**4. Purge the air and seal.**

Using your fingers, press down firmly around the mounds of ricotta to force out all trapped air before sealing the edges and cutting them into squares.

**5. Boil and marry the pasta.**

Drop the ravioli into a large pot of aggressively salted boiling water, cooking for 3 to 4 minutes until they float, then use a slotted spoon to transfer them directly into a wide pan holding a generous ladle of the warm sauce to gently toss and coat.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Embrace the weeknight permission.**

While rolling fresh semolina dough is a beautiful holiday tradition, utilizing premium store-bought pasta sheets or even Asian wonton wrappers for the ravioli on a Tuesday night is entirely within the spirit of Italian home cooking, which prizes practicality above rigid dogma.



# Mpanata della Vigilia

*em-pah-NAH-tah del-lah vee-JEE-lee-ah*

Growing up in an Ohio suburb, Christmas Eve meant the house smelled of roasting garlic, sharp aged cheese, and olive oil. They didn't serve a bloated Hollywood feast; they served Mpanata—a rustic, deeply savory stuffed bread pie born in the province of Ragusa. Designed for a meatless vigil, it relies on cauliflower, black olives, and anchovies to deliver an incredible umami punch that tastes exactly like the old country. The magic lies in two simple grandmotherly tricks: laying down toasted breadcrumbs to soak up vegetable juices, and draping the hot pie with a dish towel right out of the oven to steam the durum wheat crust into a perfect, authentic chew.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	semolina flour	<b>3 tbsp</b>	extra virgin olive oil
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	unbleached bread flour	<b>1 med</b>	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	active dry yeast	<b>5 med</b>	anchovy fillets <i>chopped</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	warm water	<b>1/2 cup</b>	black olives <i>pitted and roughly chopped</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	extra virgin olive oil	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	aged provolone cheese <i>shredded or diced</i>
<b>2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 tbsp</b>	capers <i>rinsed well</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	plain breadcrumbs <i>toasted in 1 tbsp olive oil until golden</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper
<b>1 med</b>	cauliflower <i>broken into small, bite-sized florets</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Toast the breadcrumbs.**

In a small skillet, heat a tablespoon of olive oil and toast the plain breadcrumbs until golden brown to create the moisture barrier.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Form the dough.**

In a large bowl, whisk together the warm water and yeast, letting it sit for five minutes before mixing in the semolina, bread flour, olive oil, and salt until a shaggy mass forms.

- 2. Knead and rise.**

Turn the dough out onto a counter, kneading for eight to ten minutes until smooth and elastic, then cover tightly in an oiled bowl and let it rise in a warm spot for about two hours.

**1. Steam the cauliflower.**

Steam the florets until just fork-tender, about five to seven minutes, then drain thoroughly and pat dry to avoid a soggy pie.

**2. Build the savory base.**

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat, cooking the onion until soft before melting in the chopped anchovies.

**3. Finish the filling.**

Toss the drained cauliflower into the savory oil for two minutes to drive off excess moisture, remove from heat, stir in the olives, capers, and pepper, and fold in the cheese once completely cooled.

**4. Create the moisture barrier.**

Preheat the oven to 400°F, punch down the dough, and divide it into a slightly larger and smaller piece; roll the larger piece into an 11-inch circle for the base, let it hang over the edges of a parchment-lined pan, and sprinkle the toasted breadcrumbs evenly across the bottom.

**5. Seal the pie.**

Pile the cooled filling evenly over the breadcrumbs, top with the smaller rolled sheet of dough, and fold the overhanging bottom edges upward to pinch and crimp a thick, rope-like border to lock in the steam.

**6. Bake to golden.**

Poke a few steam holes in the top crust, brush lightly with olive oil, and bake for 35 to 45 minutes until deeply browned.

**7. Rest and soften.**

The final secret is patience: remove the pie from the oven and immediately drape a clean, dry cotton dish towel over it for twenty to thirty minutes to trap the steam and perfectly soften the crust before slicing.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **The meat option.**

If the family doesn't strictly abstain from meat for the holiday, brown a half-pound of crumbled sweet Italian sausage with fennel seeds alongside the onions.

- **The coastal variation.**

Substitute a pound of desalted, flaked salt cod and thinly sliced potatoes in place of the cauliflower for a traditional seafood vigil pie.



# Linguine ai Frutti di Mare Veloce

The Feast of the Seven Fishes is a magnificent holiday undertaking, but the craving for those briny, oceanic flavors does not disappear on a random Tuesday in Ohio. In modern Italy, busy home cooks unabashedly reach for a high-quality frozen seafood medley to put this dish on the table in under thirty minutes, treating the pragmatic ingredients with deep respect. The secret to the old-world flavor is not a fresh Mediterranean catch, but the technique: fiercely searing the seafood, deglazing with crisp white wine, and vigorously tossing the undercooked linguine with a ladle of starchy pasta water to create a luxurious, emulsified glaze without a drop of heavy cream.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	linguine <i>bronze-die extruded preferred</i>	<b>1 lb</b>	frozen seafood mix <i>thawed, drained, and completely patted dry</i>
<b>4 tbsp</b>	extra virgin olive oil <i>plus extra for finishing</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	dry white wine
<b>3 large cloves</b>	garlic <i>smashed and peeled</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	cherry tomatoes <i>halved</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	crushed red pepper flakes	<b>2 tbsp</b>	kosher salt <i>divided</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>leaves finely chopped, bare stems reserved</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Thaw and dry the seafood properly.**

If using frozen seafood, thaw it overnight in the refrigerator or quickly under cold running water, then thoroughly pat it bone dry with paper towels to ensure it sears in the hot oil rather than boiling in its own thawed ice.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the sea.**

Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil, season it heavily with salt, and cook the linguine for three minutes less than the package directs for al dente.

- 2. Build the aromatic base.**

While the pasta cooks, heat the olive oil in a wide skillet over medium heat, gently sizzling the smashed garlic, reserved parsley stems, and red pepper flakes until the garlic turns a fragrant, pale golden blonde.

- 3. Sear the seafood.**

Discard the parsley stems, increase the heat to medium-high, and toss in the thoroughly dried seafood mix, searing it quickly for no more than two minutes so the proteins do not tighten into rubber.

**1. Deglaze and stain the sauce.**

Pour in the white wine, letting it bubble violently until the harsh smell of alcohol dissipates, then stir in the halved cherry tomatoes to soften and release their juices.

**2. Force the emulsion.**

Scoop out a cup of the starchy pasta water and set it aside, then transfer the undercooked linguine directly into the skillet with the seafood.

**3. Marry the pasta and sauce.**

Add a splash of the reserved pasta water to the skillet and toss vigorously over medium heat until the starches bind with the olive oil to coat every strand in a creamy, opaque glaze.

**4. Finish with freshness.**

Remove the skillet from the heat, fish out the garlic cloves if you can spot them, and toss with the chopped parsley and one final, generous glug of raw olive oil before serving immediately.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Respect the starch.**

The vigorous tossing of the pasta with its own cooking water is non-negotiable; this 'risottatura' technique is what separates a watery amateur sauce from a professional Italian emulsion.

● **Do not cheese the seafood.**

A true Sicilian grandmother would slap your hand if you tried to add Parmigiano-Reggiano to this dish; let the delicate brine of the sea remain the star.



# Timballo di Anelletti al Forno Veloce

*teem-BAHL-lo dee ah-nel-LET-tee ahl FOR-no veh-LOH-cheh*

In Palermo, this baked pasta is the undisputed king of the Sunday table, usually demanding hours of slow-simmering and intricate eggplant architecture. But for a Tuesday night in an Ohio suburb, memory relies on a more practical magic. We build a rapid thirty-minute meat sauce, skip the béchamel like a proper native, and rely on the sharp pull of provolone and a heavy dusting of breadcrumbs against a hot pan to deliver that non-negotiable, golden crust. It is a structurally sound, profoundly comforting pasta pie that tastes exactly like home, engineered for the time you actually have.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 tbsp</b>	extra-virgin olive oil	<b>1 cup</b>	frozen sweet peas
<b>1 med</b>	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>to taste</b>	kosher salt and black pepper
<b>1 med</b>	carrot <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1 lb</b>	anelletti pasta
<b>1 stalk</b>	celery <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter <i>softened</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	ground beef chuck	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fine unseasoned dry breadcrumbs
<b>1/2 lb</b>	ground pork	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	sharp provolone cheese <i>cut into 1/4-inch cubes</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	dry red wine	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	low-moisture whole milk mozzarella <i>cut into 1/4-inch cubes</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	double-concentrated tomato paste	<b>1/2 cup</b>	pecorino romano <i>grated</i>
<b>24 oz</b>	tomato puree		

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Build the savory foundation for the sauce.

Heat the olive oil in a large heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat, then sauté the diced onion, carrot, and celery until translucent before adding the beef and pork.

### 2. Toast the tomato paste in the rendered fat.

Break the meat apart with a wooden spoon until browned, then push it to the edges and let the tomato paste fry in the center for a minute to mimic the depth of traditional sun-dried extract.

### 3. Deglaze and simmer the quick ragù.

Pour in the red wine, scraping up any browned bits, and let it evaporate almost entirely before adding the tomato puree.

### 4. Sweeten the sauce with peas.

Reduce the heat to low, cover partially, and simmer for twenty minutes before stirring in the frozen peas and seasoning generously with salt and pepper.

**1. Severely undercook the pasta.**

Boil the anelletti in heavily salted water for exactly three to four minutes less than the package instructs, ensuring it stays firm enough to absorb the sauce in the oven without turning to mush.

**2. Assemble the pasta cake mixture.**

Toss the drained anelletti with three-quarters of the meat sauce in a large bowl, let it cool slightly, then fold in the cubed provolone, mozzarella, and half the pecorino.

**3. Build the essential breadcrumb crust.**

Rub a 9x13-inch baking dish generously with butter and shake the breadcrumbs around until the bottom and sides are coated in a thick, even layer.

**4. Pack the timballo and bake.**

Press the cheesy pasta mixture firmly into the prepared dish to compact it, spread the remaining sauce on top, and finish with the rest of the pecorino and a final dusting of breadcrumbs before baking at 375°F for thirty minutes.

**5. Exercise patience and let the dish rest.**

Remove the baking dish from the oven and let it sit on the counter for fifteen minutes so the molten cheeses stabilize and the starches set, allowing you to slice it cleanly like a cake.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Finding the right pasta shape is worth the effort.**

Anelletti rings are crucial because their geometry physically traps the meat sauce and peas. If you absolutely cannot find them, ditalini is the next best option.

● **The crust is non-negotiable.**

Do not skip heavily greasing the pan and dusting it with fine breadcrumbs. This creates the golden, crunchy exterior that defines a proper Palermitan baked pasta.



# Cuccia di Santa Lucia

*koo-chee-ah*

If you grew up in a Sicilian-American household, December 13th brought a strict ban on pasta and the glorious arrival of Cuccia. Born from a seventeenth-century famine, this sweet ricotta and wheat berry pudding tastes exactly like the inside of a perfect cannolo. The old-world grandmothers would soak hard wheat for three days to make it, but the reality of a busy weeknight requires a smarter approach. Swapping the traditional grain for pearled farro delivers that authentic, nostalgic chew in under thirty minutes. It is a deeply honest, historic dessert, streamlined for a modern kitchen without losing an ounce of its soul.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	whole milk ricotta <i>drained in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	candied orange peel <i>finely diced</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	pearled farro	<b>1 tsp</b>	vanilla extract
<b>3/4 cup</b>	granulated sugar	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground cinnamon
<b>1/2 cup</b>	mini semi-sweet chocolate chips	<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt

## PREPARATION

- **Drain the ricotta well in advance.**

American supermarket ricotta is packed with water, which will ruin the dessert if not addressed. Place a fine-mesh strainer over a bowl, add the ricotta, and let it drain in the fridge for at least four hours, or ideally overnight, before discarding the expelled liquid.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Cook the farro in boiling water.**

Bring a medium pot of water to a boil, add a heavy pinch of salt and the farro, and simmer uncovered until the grains are tender but still retain a pleasant, slightly resistant chew, about 20 to 25 minutes.

- 2. Cool the grain thoroughly.**

Drain the boiled farro into a sieve, rinse it briefly under cold water to stop the cooking, and let it drain until completely cool and dry.

- 3. Whip the ricotta cream until silky.**

In a large mixing bowl, combine the drained ricotta, sugar, and vanilla extract. Press the sweetened ricotta through a fine-mesh sieve with the back of a spoon, or whip it briefly with an electric hand mixer, until it transforms from a grainy cheese into a glossy, velvety cream.

**1. Fold the ingredients together.**

Add the cooled farro, chocolate chips, candied orange peel, and cinnamon into the ricotta cream, folding gently until the jeweled inclusions are evenly distributed.

**2. Chill the pudding to let the flavors marry.**

Cover the bowl tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 2 hours before serving cold in small cups, dusted with a final pinch of cinnamon.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Honor the flour ban.**

To honor the true tradition of Santa Lucia, serve this on December 13th alongside a dinner of rice-based arancini, strictly avoiding any pasta or bread for the day.

● **Store it carefully in the refrigerator.**

Cuccia keeps beautifully in the fridge for up to three days, making it a fantastic make-ahead dessert, but never freeze it as the cold will destroy the delicate texture of the ricotta.



# "Cheat" Sfingi di San Giuseppe

*sfeen-chee ahl for-no*

If you grew up in a Sicilian-American house, St. Joseph's Day meant one thing: Sfingi. The genuine, Palermo-style article is a magnificent, fist-sized cloud of fried choux pastry overflowing with sweetened sheep's milk ricotta. But deep-frying pastry dough on a Tuesday night is a messy, stressful affair that will leave your kitchen smelling like a state fair. This is the ultimate, unapologetic cheat. We bake the choux dough in a blazing hot oven—a respected Sicilian technique known as *sfincci al forno*—giving you the exact same hollow, airy shell without a

drop of frying oil. The only rule you cannot break? Drain your supermarket ricotta overnight. That is the real secret to mimicking the thick, luxurious texture of the old country.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>32 oz</b>	whole milk ricotta cheese <i>drained overnight</i>	<b>4 large</b>	eggs <i>at room temperature</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	granulated sugar	<b>1/4 cup</b>	unsalted pistachios <i>chopped</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	mini semi-sweet chocolate chips	<b>2 tbsp</b>	candied orange peel <i>chopped, or substitute thick-cut orange marmalade</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	water	<b>12 med</b>	Amarena cherries <i>drained, or substitute maraschino cherries</i>
<b>6 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter <i>cut into cubes</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	powdered sugar <i>for dusting</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt		
<b>1 cup</b>	all-purpose flour		

## PREPARATION

- **Drain the ricotta overnight.**

Line a fine-mesh strainer with cheesecloth or paper towels, set it over a bowl, add the ricotta, cover, and refrigerate for at least 8 hours. Discard the liquid. This is non-negotiable for achieving the correct texture.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Mix the ricotta cream.**

Transfer your thickened, drained ricotta to a mixing bowl, add the sugar, and beat vigorously until impossibly smooth and creamy. Fold in the chocolate chips and keep chilled.

**1. Melt the butter and water.**

Preheat your oven to 425°F and line a large baking sheet with parchment paper. In a medium saucepan, combine the water, cubed butter, and salt. Bring to a rolling boil over medium-high heat, ensuring the butter is completely melted before the next step.

**2. Gelatinize the flour.**

Remove the pan from the heat and immediately dump in the flour all at once. Stir vigorously with a wooden spoon until it forms a shaggy dough, then return to medium heat. Mash and stir constantly for 1 to 2 minutes until the dough forms a smooth ball and leaves a thin, white film on the bottom of the pan. Transfer to a bowl and let cool for 5 to 10 minutes so you do not scramble the eggs.

**3. Incorporate the eggs one at a time.**

Beating vigorously by hand or with a mixer on medium-low, add the eggs one by one. The dough will look separated and slimy at first—do not panic. Wait until each egg is fully absorbed before adding the next. When finished, the dough should be thick, glossy, and smooth.

**4. Drop the dough and bake without opening the door.**

Drop generous, golf-ball-sized dollops of dough onto the baking sheet, leaving about 2 inches between them. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes. Do not open the oven door under any circumstances, or the sudden temperature drop will cause the steam to escape and your pastries to collapse into dense pancakes.

**5. Cool, fill, and garnish.**

Once deeply golden, puffed, and crisp, remove the sfingi and cool completely on a wire rack. Slice them partially in half like a clamshell, generously spoon in the ricotta cream so it overflows, and garnish with pistachios, a piece of orange peel, and a cherry. Finish with a heavy dusting of powdered sugar.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip draining the ricotta.**

American cow's milk ricotta is far wetter than the sheep's milk ricotta used in Sicily. If you don't drain it overnight, your filling will be soup.

- **Trust the process with the eggs.**

The choux dough will look like a ruined, slimy mess after each egg addition. Keep beating; it will miraculously come back together into a glossy paste.



# Agnello Pasquale a Scottadito

*ahn-YELL-oh pah-SKWAH-leh ah skoht-tah-DEE-toh*

In Sicily, Easter lamb implies an intricate marzipan pastry or a slow-simmered stew, but in the mid-century American suburbs, first-generation families embraced the Roman scottadito—literally "burnt fingers." It is an aggressive, unapologetic way to cook meat: cut thick, soaked in a heavy-handed marinade of garlic, olive oil, and rosemary, then blistered over savage heat. You pull them off the fire, hit them with a squeeze of lemon, and eat them by hand straight from the platter while the fat is still sizzling. It is primal, fast enough for a Tuesday, and exactly how the old guard ate.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 med</b>	racks of lamb <i>sliced cleanly between the rib bones into individual chops</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	dried oregano
<b>1/3 cup</b>	extra virgin olive oil	<b>1 tbsp</b>	white wine vinegar
<b>4 large</b>	cloves garlic <i>peeled and gently smashed</i>	<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>3 med</b>	sprigs fresh rosemary <i>leaves stripped and coarsely chopped</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
		<b>1 med</b>	lemon <i>cut into wedges</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Combine the marinade ingredients in a shallow dish.**

Whisk together the olive oil, smashed garlic, rosemary, oregano, vinegar, salt, and black pepper.

- **Massage the meat.**

Add the lamb chops to the dish and use your hands to work the marinade into the meat, making sure every chop is thoroughly coated.

- **Let the lamb sit at room temperature.**

Leave the chops out for 30 minutes to take the chill off before cooking, which ensures they cook evenly.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Preheat a heavy cast-iron skillet or grill pan over medium-high heat.**

Let it heat up for at least 5 minutes until it is smoking hot and ready to blister the meat.

- 2. Render the fat caps.**

Remove the chops from the marinade, shaking off excess oil and discarding the smashed garlic so it does not burn. Hold three or four chops together with tongs and stand them upright, fat-side down, on the hot skillet for 1 to 2 minutes until the fat crisps and lubricates the pan.

**1. Sear the chops undisturbed.**

Lay the chops flat and let them sear for 3 to 4 minutes until a deep, caramelized crust forms.

**2. Flip and finish cooking.**

Turn the chops and cook for an additional 2 to 3 minutes on the second side to achieve a juicy, medium-rare interior.

**3. Rest briefly and serve immediately.**

Transfer the lamb to a warm platter and let it rest for exactly 2 to 3 minutes so the juices settle without the bones cooling down, then serve with fresh lemon wedges.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Buy whole racks and cut them yourself.**

Supermarkets often sell paper-thin pre-cut chops that overcook instantly; slicing your own ensures a thick cut that can handle the high heat required for a proper crust.

● **The vinegar cuts the funk.**

American spring lamb is older and stronger than Italian milk-fed lamb, so the splash of vinegar in the marinade helps neutralize the gamey flavor while tenderizing the meat.



## Lenticchie e Salsiccia di Capodanno

In Sicily, the turn of the year isn't about cheap champagne; it's an ancient, deeply superstitious insurance policy. The premium is paid in lentils, eaten at the stroke of midnight to mimic the gold coins you hope to see in your pockets for the next twelve months. Down south, our ancestors skipped the boiled northern cotechino for heavily spiced, fennel-laced pork salsiccia. This isn't a watery, anemic soup. It is an *umido* braise—thick, aggressively earthy, clinging to the meat and smelling exactly like a midwinter kitchen in the motherland. It's deeply comforting, incredibly practical peasant food that comes together effortlessly on a weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	sweet Italian pork sausage <i>removed from casing and sliced into thick coins</i>	<b>1 sprig</b>	fresh rosemary
<b>3 tbsp</b>	extra virgin olive oil	<b>2 med</b>	dried bay leaves
<b>1 med</b>	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1 med strip</b>	fresh orange peel <i>zest only, no pith</i>
<b>1 large</b>	carrot <i>peeled and finely diced</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	dry white wine
<b>1 med</b>	celery stalk <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1 1/4 cup</b>	dried brown lentils <i>rinsed and picked over</i>
<b>2 small cloves</b>	garlic <i>smashed</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	tomato paste
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried fennel seeds <i>lightly crushed</i>	<b>4 cup</b>	hot water
		<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
		<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Brown the sausage to render its fat.**

Heat a tablespoon of olive oil in a heavy Dutch oven over medium-high heat, add the sausage coins, and brown them deeply on both sides. They don't need to be cooked through; remove them with a slotted spoon, leaving their spiced, rendered fat in the pot.

### 2. **Sweat the aromatic foundation.**

Lower the heat to medium, add the remaining olive oil, and sauté the diced onion, carrot, and celery in the pork fat for about 8 minutes until translucent. Stir in the garlic, crushed fennel seeds, rosemary, and bay leaves, cooking for one more minute to bloom their oils.

### 3. **Toast the lentils and deglaze the pan.**

Stir in the tomato paste, letting it caramelize to a brick red, then add the lentils to toast briefly in the fat. Pour in the white wine, scrape up any browned bits on the bottom, and let the liquid evaporate completely.

**1. Simmer the lentils gently with incremental liquid.**

Pour in three cups of the hot water and drop in the orange peel, bringing it to a gentle simmer. Partially cover and cook on low for 20 minutes, holding back the remaining water and only adding it half a cup at a time if the pot looks dry to ensure a thick, gravy-like consistency.

**2. Reunite the sausage with the lentils to thicken.**

Return the browned sausages and any resting juices to the pot and simmer uncovered for another 15 to 20 minutes. The lentils should become completely tender but hold their shape, melding with the meat juices to thicken the stew.

**3. Finish with olive oil and serve.**

Discard the bay leaves, rosemary stem, and orange peel, then season aggressively with black pepper and salt to taste. Ladle into shallow bowls, finishing each with a heavy drizzle of high-quality extra-virgin olive oil and crusty bread.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Respect the liquid rule.**

Do not drown the pot. The hallmark of an authentic in umido braise is adding liquid slowly so the lentil starches emulsify with the fat into a thick gravy.

● **Use the weeknight cheat if necessary.**

If you are desperate on a Tuesday night, substitute two cans of rinsed brown lentils and reduce the broth to one cup, simmering for just 10 minutes to meld the flavors.





# Weekend Bakery Box: Sunday Sweets and Cookie Tins

*Translating complex Italian bakery pastries and immense holiday cookie-baking efforts into achievable weekend baking projects for the modern home kitchen.*

It's the old Sunday morning ritual: the white cardboard box, tied tight with baker's twine, bleeding just a little grease at the corners. Inside, an absolute embarrassment of ricotta, almond paste, and anise. But the old neighborhood joints are fading out, and the matriarchs who once cranked out holiday cookie tins by sheer force of will aren't around forever. What do you do when you can't just buy the good stuff anymore? You roll up your sleeves.

This isn't about recreating a manic, three-day commercial pastry operation. It's about taking those mythic sweets—the sesame cookies, the shatteringly crisp cannoli, the dense almond paste—and figuring out how to pull them off on a quiet Saturday afternoon with ingredients from a normal American supermarket. Because some traditions are too damn important to let die in a fluorescent-lit commercial bakery aisle.





# Biscotti Regina Veloce

*vee-SCOT-tah cah joo-joo-LAY-nah*

If you grew up in a Sicilian-American household, the smell of toasting sesame is permanently etched into your memory. Biscotti Regina are the ultimate representation of old-world baking. They aren't cloyingly sweet; instead, they rely on a humble, deeply savory crust of seeds wrapped around a lemon-scented shortbread that shatters perfectly when dunked into black coffee. Frank Sinatra used to order these by the box from New York, demanding they be baked a little on the burnt side. This fast version trades traditional lard and baker's ammonia for accessible supermarket staples, recreating that exact nostalgic crunch without a specialty grocery run.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 1/2 cup</b>	unbleached all-purpose flour	<b>1 large</b>	large egg <i>room temperature</i>
<b>3/4 cup</b>	granulated sugar	<b>1/4 cup</b>	whole milk
<b>1 tbsp</b>	baking powder	<b>1 tsp</b>	pure vanilla extract
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	fine sea salt	<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh orange or lemon zest <i>tightly packed</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	unsalted butter <i>cold and cut into small cubes</i>	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	sesame seeds
<b>1/4 cup</b>	vegetable shortening <i>cold</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	milk or water <i>for dipping</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the dry ingredients together in a large bowl.**  
Combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt.
- 2. Cut the cold butter and shortening into the flour mixture.**  
Use your fingertips or a pastry blender to rub the fats into the flour until it resembles coarse, wet sand. Tiny pebbles of fat are what make the cookie crisp, so do not overwork it.
- 3. Incorporate the wet ingredients to form a soft dough.**  
Make a well in the center and add the egg, milk, vanilla extract, and citrus zest. Gently pull the flour into the wet center and knead just until a pliable dough forms, adding a splash more milk if it feels too dry.
- 4. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator for at least thirty minutes.**  
This crucial resting phase allows the flour to hydrate and the fats to re-solidify so the cookies hold their shape in the oven.
- 5. Preheat the oven to 350°F and line two baking sheets with parchment paper.**  
Set up a coating station with a shallow bowl containing a splash of milk or water, and a separate dish filled with the sesame seeds.

- 1. Roll handfuls of dough into ropes about the thickness of your thumb.**  
Cut the ropes into small pieces about one and a half inches long.
- 2. Moisten the dough pieces and coat them heavily in sesame seeds.**  
Lightly wet your hands with the milk or water, roll the dough pieces to make them tacky, and drop them directly into the seeds. Press gently to ensure every side is completely encrusted.
- 3. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes until the seeds are deeply fragrant and the cookies are golden brown.**  
Rotate the pans halfway through. Sinatra liked them a little burnt, so do not pull them too early if you want that authentic crunch.
- 4. Transfer the cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.**  
They will feel slightly soft when hot but will harden into their signature shatteringly crisp texture once they reach room temperature.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Swap baking powder for baker's ammonia if you want total authenticity.**  
Traditional Sicilian bakers use ammonium carbonate to achieve an explosive, unparalleled crunch. If you can find it online, substitute the baking powder with two teaspoons of baker's ammonia. Don't be alarmed by the strong smell during baking; it dissipates completely.
- **Mix a little fine semolina into the dough for a more rustic texture.**  
To mimic the island's locally milled wheat, you can swap a half cup of the all-purpose flour for fine semolina flour.



# Paste di Mandorle e Pignoli

*pah-steh dee mahn-dor-leh eh peen-yoh-lee*

There is a sacred smell that belongs to Sunday afternoons in a first-generation Italian-American household: espresso hitting the carafe and the sweet, earthy aroma of toasted pine nuts from a bakery box. These cookies are the undisputed crown jewels of that box, a thousand-year-old Sicilian tradition often reduced over the decades to commercial shortcuts. To recreate the authentic, macaroon-like chew and crispy shell, you don't need expensive canned almond paste. You just need supermarket almond flour and the ultimate old-world secret: patience. The overnight rest is non-negotiable, forming a microscopic skin that locks the soft almond goodness inside and ensures the cookies hold their plump shape instead of melting flat in the heat of the oven.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 1/2 cup</b>	blanched almond flour	<b>1 tsp</b>	lemon zest <i>freshly grated</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	granulated sugar	<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt
<b>2 large</b>	egg whites <i>lightly beaten until frothy</i>	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	pine nuts
<b>1 tsp</b>	honey	<b>1 large</b>	egg white <i>lightly beaten</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	bitter almond extract	<b>1 tbsp</b>	powdered sugar <i>for dusting</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Separate the eggs cleanly.**

Ensure absolutely no yolk contaminates the egg whites, as the fat will inhibit their structural binding power.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk together the dry ingredients.**

In a large mixing bowl, thoroughly combine the almond flour, granulated sugar, and kosher salt.

- 2. Mix the dough.**

Pour the two frothy egg whites, honey, bitter almond extract, and lemon zest into the dry mixture, using your hands or a wooden spoon to mix until a thick, slightly sticky dough forms.

- 3. Roll and coat the cookies.**

Pinch off walnut-sized pieces of dough and roll them into smooth balls. Dip the bottom of each lightly into the single beaten egg white to act as glue, then roll the entire ball generously in the pine nuts, pressing gently so they adhere.

**1. Rest the dough overnight.**

Place the coated cookies 2 inches apart on a parchment-lined baking sheet and refrigerate them uncovered for 10 to 12 hours; do not skip this step.

**2. Bake until lightly toasted.**

Preheat the oven to 325°F and bake on the middle rack for 14 to 16 minutes, just until the pine nuts turn a light golden brown and the cookies show tiny cracks.

**3. Cool completely on the pan.**

The cookies will be exceptionally fragile when hot, so let them cool completely on the baking sheet to firm up before moving them or dusting with powdered sugar.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Adjusting the dough consistency.**

If the dough feels impossibly dry while mixing, add water a half teaspoon at a time. If it is too wet to roll, lightly dust in a little extra almond flour.

● **Sourcing and setting the pine nuts.**

Standard supermarket pine nuts work perfectly for this weeknight bake. To ensure none go to waste, roll the dough balls firmly between your palms so the nuts embed deeply into the surface.



## "Cheat's" Cuccidati in Teglia

*koo-chee-DAH-tee een TELL-yah*

The smell of cuccidati is the undisputed king of the Italian-American holiday tin. Historically, grandmothers spent days painstakingly shaping these spiced fig, chocolate, and citrus cookies into intricate rings. But let's be honest: you have a job, kids, and maybe an hour on a Sunday afternoon. This "cheat's" method honors the authentic old-world flavor but rolls the dough into simple logs to be sliced right on the sheet pan. By trading hard-to-find Italian candied squash for high-quality orange marmalade, you get the exact comforting taste of childhood without surrendering your entire weekend.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 1/2 cup</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>1/2 cup</b>	walnuts <i>toasted</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	granulated sugar	<b>1/2 cup</b>	almonds <i>toasted</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	unsalted butter <i>cold and cubed</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	dark chocolate chips
<b>1/4 cup</b>	vegetable shortening <i>cold</i>	<b>1/3 cup</b>	orange marmalade
<b>2 large</b>	eggs	<b>3 tbsp</b>	sweet Marsala wine
<b>1/4 cup</b>	whole milk	<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cinnamon
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	baking powder	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground cloves
<b>1 tsp</b>	vanilla extract	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground nutmeg
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	fine sea salt	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	powdered sugar
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	dried Mission figs <i>hard stems removed</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	fresh lemon juice
<b>1/2 cup</b>	dark raisins	<b>1/4 cup</b>	rainbow sprinkles

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Pulse the dry ingredients, cut in the cold fats, and bind with the wet ingredients until a cohesive dough forms.**

In a food processor or large bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Cut in the cold butter and shortening until it resembles coarse sand, then mix in the eggs, milk, and vanilla. Do not overwork the dough or the pastry will become tough.

- 2. Divide the dough in half, wrap tightly in plastic, and refrigerate for at least 45 minutes.**

This resting period allows the gluten to relax and the fats to re-solidify, ensuring a tender, short crumb that won't spread in the oven.

- 1. Process the figs, raisins, nuts, marmalade, Marsala, and spices into a thick paste, then pulse in the chocolate.**

Pulse the mixture in a food processor until it becomes sticky and cohesive. Add the chocolate chips at the very end, pulsing just two or three times to leave distinct textural flecks rather than muddying the filling.

- 2. Roll out the dough, divide it into strips, and encase the filling down the center.**

Preheat your oven to 350°F and line a baking sheet with parchment. Roll one piece of chilled dough into a 12x8-inch rectangle and cut it lengthwise into two 4-inch wide strips. Spoon half the filling into cylinders down the center of each, folding the long edges over to overlap and gently seal the seam.

- 3. Transfer the logs to the baking sheet seam-side down, slice them diagonally, and bake until pale golden brown.**

Cut the logs crosswise into 1-inch diagonal slices, pulling them about a half-inch apart so the heat can reach the edges and caramelize the exposed fig. Bake for 18 to 22 minutes.

- 4. Whisk the powdered sugar and lemon juice into a thick glaze, drizzle generously over the cooled cookies, and shower with sprinkles.**

Apply the sprinkles immediately before the glaze sets.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **The fats matter.**

Traditional Sicilian baking leans heavily on strutto (lard) for its intensely short, flaky pastry. A 50/50 split of unsalted butter and vegetable shortening gives you the rich dairy flavor of butter alongside the superior flakiness of shortening, perfectly mimicking the old-world crumb using standard American supermarket staples.

- **Patience pays off.**

Cuccidati actually taste better on day three. Store them in an airtight tin at room temperature; the moisture from the fig filling will slowly soften the crust over time, marrying the flavors perfectly just the way they were meant to be enjoyed.



# Tetù e Totò al Cioccolato

*teh-TOO eh toh-TOH ahl choh-koh-LAH-toh*

If you grew up in a Sicilian-American household, the smell of these baking means the holidays have arrived. Originally a brilliant way for thrifty bakers to upcycle leftover pastry scraps, modern Tetù e Totò rely on two old-world constants to achieve their shatteringly crisp glaze and porous, melt-in-the-mouth center: lard and baker's ammonia. Forget the butter and chocolate chips of more recent diaspora adaptations. This is the unadulterated taste of the homeland, unapologetic and real, and surprisingly easy to pull off on a busy weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 1/2 cup</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>1 med</b>	organic orange <i>zested</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	almond flour	<b>2/3 cup</b>	lard <i>at room temperature</i>
<b>3/4 cup</b>	granulated sugar	<b>1 large</b>	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>
<b>1/3 cup</b>	unsweetened cocoa powder	<b>3/4 cup</b>	whole milk
<b>2 1/2 tsp</b>	baker's ammonia	<b>2 1/2 cup</b>	powdered sugar <i>sifted</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cinnamon	<b>1/4 cup</b>	unsweetened cocoa powder
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground cloves	<b>1/4 cup</b>	hot water
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt		

## PREPARATION

- **Preheat the oven to 350°F.**  
Line two large baking sheets with parchment paper.
- **Bring the lard to room temperature.**  
Cold lard will not cut into the flour properly, which ruins the texture of the cookie.
- **Sift the powdered sugar.**  
Lumpy powdered sugar makes for a clumpy glaze, and these cookies rely on a flawlessly smooth shell.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the dry ingredients together in a large bowl.**  
Combine the all-purpose flour, almond flour, granulated sugar, 1/3 cup of the cocoa powder, baker's ammonia, cinnamon, cloves, kosher salt, and orange zest.
- 2. Rub the room-temperature lard into the dry ingredients using your fingertips.**  
Keep pinching and tossing until the mixture resembles coarse, damp sand with no large lumps of fat remaining. Lard coats the flour better than butter, preventing tough gluten from forming and ensuring that signature Sicilian crumbly texture.

- 1. Add the beaten egg and a half cup of the milk, gently kneading until the mixture forms a soft, slightly sticky dough.**

If it feels too dry and crumbly, add the remaining milk a tablespoon at a time until it comes together.

- 2. Pinch off pieces of dough and roll them into balls slightly larger than a walnut.**

Space them an inch apart on parchment-lined baking sheets and bake at 350°F for 15 to 18 minutes until puffed and slightly cracked. Don't panic if your kitchen smells strongly of ammonia; the scent completely vanishes as the cookies cool.

- 3. Whisk the powdered sugar and remaining quarter cup of cocoa powder with the hot water until smooth.**

This is your liffia, or glaze. It should be thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, but thin enough to drip off slowly.

- 4. Lower the oven to 200°F, dip the top half of each cooled cookie into the glaze, and return them to the oven for 5 to 10 minutes.**

This final step is the true bakery secret, flash-drying the glaze to set it into an authentic, crisp, matte shell.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Baker's ammonia is the old-world secret to a crisp, airy cookie, but baking powder works in a pinch.**

If you can't source it, substitute 1 tablespoon of standard baking powder. The cookies will be a little softer and more cake-like, but still incredible.

- **If you cannot find lard, substitute an equal amount of softened unsalted butter.**

You will lose a bit of the traditional friable texture, but the nostalgic flavor remains intact.

- **These cookies have an incredible shelf life.**

Store them in an airtight tin at room temperature, and they will stay perfect for up to 10 days.



# Biscotti "Esse" al Limone

*skwee-zee-tee rah-goo-zah-nee*

In the Americanized bakery, these cookies are often buried beneath a thick glaze and rainbow sprinkles, but the authentic old-world version from Ragusa relies entirely on the honesty of the dough. The secret to their profound aroma isn't a plastic bottle of extract, but the abrasive friction of rubbing fresh lemon zest directly into granulated sugar. Paired with a delicate, short crumb achieved by cutting cold fat into the flour, it is a masterclass in regional technique that requires nothing more than the contents of a standard midwestern supermarket.

## INGREDIENTS

**1 cup** granulated sugar

**2 large** organic lemons  
*zested*

**3 1/2 cup** all-purpose flour

**1 tbsp** baking powder

**1/4 tsp** kosher salt

**1/2 cup** unsalted butter  
*cold and cubed*

**1/4 cup** vegetable shortening  
*cold*

**2 large** large eggs  
*room temperature*

**3 tbsp** whole milk

**2 tbsp** granulated sugar  
*for finishing*

## PREPARATION

- **Preheat the oven to 400°F.**

Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Extract the essential lemon oils.**

In a large bowl, combine the 1 cup of granulated sugar and the lemon zest, rubbing them together vigorously with your fingertips for a minute until the sugar is pale yellow and resembles wet, highly fragrant sand.

- 2. Perform the sablage to cut in the fats.**

Whisk the flour, baking powder, and salt into the lemon sugar, then drop in the cold butter and shortening. Use your fingers to rub the fats into the flour until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs, coating the proteins to ensure a tender, crisp cookie rather than a tough one.

- 3. Form the dough gently.**

Create a well in the center and add the eggs, gently mixing them with a fork while pulling in the flour. Knead gently with your hands, adding the milk one tablespoon at a time just until a smooth, cohesive mass forms without overworking it.

- 4. Rest the dough in the refrigerator.**

Wrap the dough tightly in plastic wrap and chill for at least 30 minutes to hydrate the flour and firm the fats, preventing the cookies from spreading into puddles in the oven.

**1. Shape the traditional S curve.**

Break off heaping tablespoons of dough and roll each piece on an unfloured surface into a 3-inch rope about the thickness of a thumb. Curl the top end to the right and the bottom end to the left to form an S, spacing them two inches apart on the prepared baking sheets.

**2. Bake until puffed and golden.**

Brush the tops lightly with milk, sprinkle with the remaining granulated sugar, and bake for 12 to 15 minutes until lightly browned on the bottom and edges. Let cool completely on a wire rack, where they will crisp up as they rest.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **A note on ancestral ingredients.**

While butter and baking powder are practical for a weeknight, the absolute traditional standard in Sicily utilizes high-quality rendered lard (*strutto*) and baker's ammonia (*ammoniaca per dolci*) dissolved in warm milk to achieve an impossibly friable, airy crunch.

● **The Italian-American bakery glaze.**

If you want to replicate the festive cookie tin aesthetic of the diaspora, whisk a cup and a half of powdered sugar with a tablespoon of lemon juice and a splash of milk, dip the cooled cookies, and top with rainbow sprinkles.



# "Bakery Box" Cannoli

The authentic Sicilian cannolo is a masterpiece of chemistry and patience, born in the homeland and perfected in the Italian-American bakeries of the diaspora. Forget the soggy, pre-filled grocery store imitations. The real magic lies in a meticulously strained ricotta and an unshakable rule to fill the blistered shells strictly to order. Whether you tackle the frying yourself or outsource the shells to a trusted local bakery, this is how you capture that perfect, shattering crunch and creamy, nostalgic soul of a Sunday afternoon.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>32 oz</b>	Whole Milk Ricotta Cheese <i>drained for 12 to 24 hours</i>	<b>1 1/4 cup</b>	Confectioner's Sugar
		<b>1 tsp</b>	Pure Vanilla Extract

<b>1/2 cup</b>	Mini Semi-Sweet Chocolate Chips	<b>1 large</b>	egg <i>separated</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	Mascarpone cheese <i>optional, to restore richness</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	Dry Marsala Wine
<b>2 cup</b>	All-Purpose Flour	<b>1 tbsp</b>	White Wine Vinegar
<b>2 tbsp</b>	Granulated Sugar	<b>2 qt</b>	neutral oil <i>for frying</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	Unsweetened Cocoa Powder	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Mini Semi-Sweet Chocolate Chips <i>for dipping</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	Ground Cinnamon	<b>1/4 cup</b>	Confectioner's Sugar <i>for dusting</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	Fine Sea Salt		
<b>2 tbsp</b>	Unsalted Butter <i>softened</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Drain the ricotta overnight.**

Line a fine-mesh strainer with a double layer of cheesecloth or paper towels, place it over a deep bowl, spoon in the ricotta, cover, and weigh it down with a heavy can in the refrigerator for 12 to 24 hours to expel the watery whey.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Mix the dough for the shells.**

Whisk the flour, granulated sugar, cocoa powder, cinnamon, and salt in a bowl, then rub in the softened butter until it resembles coarse sand. Add half the beaten egg, the Marsala, and the vinegar, kneading vigorously for five to eight minutes until you have a stiff, dry dough, then wrap tightly in plastic and rest for one hour.

- 2. Prepare the crema.**

Push the heavily drained, dry ricotta through a fine-mesh sieve with a spatula to achieve a silky texture, then fold in the confectioner's sugar, vanilla, and mascarpone if using. Gently fold in the chocolate chips, transfer the filling to a piping bag, and keep it chilled.

**1. Roll and shape the dough.**

Roll the rested dough paper-thin using a pasta machine or rolling pin, cut into 4-inch circles, stretch into slight ovals, and wrap loosely around oiled metal cannoli tubes, using a dab of the reserved egg white to firmly seal the overlapping dough.

**2. Fry the shells to a blistered crunch.**

Heat the neutral oil to exactly 350°F in a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven, carefully frying the tubes two or three at a time until deeply golden and blistered, then drain on a wire rack and slide out the metal molds while they are still warm.

**3. Fill strictly to order.**

Never assemble a cannolo until the moment it is meant to be eaten. Pipe the chilled crema into both ends of a cooled shell, dip the exposed edges into chocolate chips, dust the entire plate heavily with powdered sugar, and serve immediately.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The semi-homemade permission slip.**

Frying homemade shells is a beautiful weekend project, but the true soul of this dessert is the freshly piped crema. There is absolutely no shame in buying high-quality, empty shells from a local Italian bakery and focusing your energy solely on perfecting the filling.

● **Temperature control is non-negotiable.**

If you choose to fry, keep a candy thermometer in the oil and maintain it strictly at 350°F. If it drops too low, the shells turn unpleasantly greasy; if it climbs too high, they will burn before cooking through.