

## RECIPIES

### **Arancini**

Pinch of saffron  
600g Arborio rice (or other risotto rice)  
1 tsp salt  
Olive oil  
1 onion, finely chopped  
250g lean minced beef  
130g cooked peas  
4 tbsp dry white wine  
1/2 tsp finely chopped thyme  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
3 large eggs, separated  
50g freshly grated Parmesan (or Pecorino) cheese  
100g flour, for dredging  
150g breadcrumbs

1. Dissolve the saffron in 125ml warm water.
2. Place the rice in a saucepan with the saffron water and add another 1 1/2 litres of water. Add the salt and bring to the boil. Cover, lower the heat and simmer until the water has been absorbed and the rice is tender, which will take about 20 minutes. Let the rice cool to room temperature.
3. Meanwhile, heat some olive oil in a large frying pan. Sauté the onion on a low heat for 7–10 minutes, until transparent. Add the minced beef and cook, stirring, for about 5 minutes, until the meat is fully cooked. Add the peas and wine and cook until the wine evaporates. Season with thyme, salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.
4. Add the egg yolks and grated cheese to the cooked rice and mix well. Place the flour in a shallow bowl. Place the breadcrumbs in a separate shallow bowl. Set aside.
5. In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites briefly with a fork. Brush about 1/2 tsp of egg white on the palm of your hand, press 2 heaped tbsp rice into it and mould it into a hollow, cup-like shell. Fill the hollow with 1 tbsp of the meat mixture. Cover the filling with about 1 1/2 tbsp of rice and use both hands to seal the filling inside and shape into a ball about the size of a small orange.

6. Roll each arancina (ball) first in flour, then in the remaining egg white and finally in the breadcrumbs.

7 Pour enough oil into a small saucepan to a depth of about 15cm. When it is very hot, deep-fry the rice balls two or three at a time, turning occasionally, until golden brown on all sides. Drain them on kitchen paper and serve warm.

\* To check if the oil is sufficiently hot, drop a cube of bread in- it should be brown immediately. If the oil isn't at the correct temperature for cooking the arancini, they will simply soak up the oil rather than crisp.

### **Caponata:** Serves six

2 medium aubergines, cut into 2cm cubes  
salt and freshly ground black pepper  
extra virgin olive oil  
2 large onions, chopped  
5 celery stalks, trimmed and cut into 1.5cm pieces  
500ml tomato sauce (p. 130)  
65g capers, rinsed  
50ml white wine vinegar  
sugar, to taste  
125g green olives  
crusty bread, to serve

Degorge the aubergine by placing the cubes in a colander and sprinkling with salt. Leave for 30 minutes to allow the bitter juices to drain, then rinse the aubergine and pat dry.

Heat some olive oil in a deep frying pan. Shallow fry the aubergines until they are soft and golden in colour. Drain on kitchen paper.

Heat a pan with oil. Sauté the onions and celery on a low heat for 7–10 minutes, until they begin to colour. Add the tomato sauce, capers, vinegar and sugar and simmer for 5 minutes. Add the aubergine and olives and cook for a further 10 minutes. Season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

Allow to cool and refrigerate for 24 hours before serving. Serve at room temperature with crusty bread.

For more of an Arab influence to this dish, add raisins and pine nuts.

## **Pesto Trapanese: Makes 250ml**

125g blanched almonds

2 garlic cloves

50g fresh basil leaves

200ml extra virgin olive oil

3 ripe tomatoes, 10 ripe cherry tomatoes or 1/2 x 400g tin of cherry tomatoes

1 tsp sugar

salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 190°C.
2. Place the almonds on a baking tray and lightly toast them in the oven for 5–8 minutes, until golden brown.
3. Roughly chop the almonds, garlic and basil. Place in a pestle and mortar, add the olive oil and pound to form a smooth paste. Add the tomatoes, sugar and salt and pepper to taste and blend gently.
4. This will keep for about 1 week in the fridge.

All pesto will keep in your fridge for about 1 week, but remember to pour a layer of extra virgin olive oil over the top of the pesto to prevent the basil from going black.