

# Eileen Dunne Crescenzi's Mediterranean Meals

## **Zuppa di Verdura**

Variations of minestrone soup, based on seasonal ingredients, is a primary staple food throughout the regions of Italy. Zuppa di verdure, a blended minestra is best eaten warm.

### Ingredients

100g diced onion  
100g diced carrot  
100 g diced celery  
150 g peas (frozen is fine)  
200 g fresh spinach leaves  
250g diced courgettes  
200 g diced potato  
Small handful of chopped parsley  
3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil  
50 g grated parmigiano cheese  
Half litre of water (add water during the cooking process if the soup tends to dry)  
Salt and pepper to taste  
Sauté' the onion, carrot and celery over a low heat for 5 minutes  
Add the parsley, peas, courgettes, potato and spinach and continue to cook for a further 5 minutes  
Pour in the water and bring to the boil  
Add salt, lower the heat and simmer for 20 minutes  
Leave to cool and then blend with a hand blender  
Serve warm or cold and garnish with grated parmigiano

### Suggestions:

Modify flavour with thyme or mint, serve with a teaspoon of pesto or croutons

## **Panzanella**

An easy to prepare refreshing Tuscan salad using firm/stale bread, preferably sourdough.

### **Ingredients**

250g firm/stale bread (sourdough, including crust)

150g water

3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil

500g cherry tomatoes, diced

2 cucumbers, diced

Handful of fresh basil leaves

1 finely sliced red onion

One tablespoon of toasted pine nuts

Lemon zest of half lemon, optional

3 tablespoons of wine vinegar

Salt and pepper to taste

### **Method**

Cut the bread into small cubes and place in a serving bowl.

Pour in the water, mix and leave to rest for 20 minutes

Add the tomatoes, cucumber, onion and basil and stir gently

Add the olive oil, vinegar, salt and pepper, stir and sprinkle with toasted nuts

Place in the refrigeration and serve cold as a salad or antipasto

Variations - Panzanella re-visited, add a couple of these ingredients:

Shredded raw peppers, garlic, raisins, parsley, walnuts, anchovies, capers, pickles, rucola

**Penne pasta with mussels, aubergines and whipped ricotta**  
**Pennette con cozze, melanzane e ricotta montata**

Serves 6

1 kg fresh mussels  
500g ridged penne pasta  
8 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
250 ml of white wine  
2 aubergines, diced (with skin) into 2cm cubes  
2 garlic cloves, peeled and left whole  
1 teaspoon chilli flakes  
150g ricotta cheese  
Zest of one lemon  
Salt to taste

Method

Rinse the mussels in cold water and remove the beards. Tap any open mussels on the side of a plate and if they don't close, discard them.

Warm 4 tablespoons of olive oil in a large saucepan over a low heat. Add the diced aubergines, cover the pan and cook for 10 minutes, stirring regularly. Remove the aubergine with a slotted spoon and drain on kitchen paper.

Meanwhile cook the pasta in a large saucepan of boiling salted water until al dente or according to the instructions on the packet.

In a separate large saucepan (one that is big enough to accommodate the pasta later), heat the remaining 4 tablespoons of olive oil over a low heat. Sauté the garlic and chilli flakes for 1 minute, until the garlic is softened but not browned. Add the mussels and cover with a lid. Cook until the mussels have opened. Pour in the wine and higher the heat for a minute. Remove from the heat and discard any unopened mussels.

Whip the ricotta for 30 seconds in a blender along with the lemon zest.

Drain the pasta and add to the saucepan of mussels. Add the aubergines, season with salt to taste and mix well.

Divide the pasta between six pasta bowls. Top each portion with a dollop of whipped ricotta and chopped parsley.