



Cooking with Greg – 8:40AM Wednesdays

Polenta Recipes

Polenta translates as corn meal mush, but it's much more. It's the staple food of the north, where it still outshines pasta, and can be served in innumerable ways, as a first course, baked, with stews, or even as a bread substitute.

Most People Think Of Pasta As The Quintessential Italian Dish, and this is true for much of the Peninsula, especially the south. Polenta, on the other hand, was the staple food of the poor in the North, especially those living out in the country. And it's still a staple today, North Italians still eat it today, because it's very tasty, extremely versatile, and an ideal accompaniment to all sorts of things.

Polenta alla Sarda

A hearty, rustic Sardinian polenta dish with cheese and tomato sauce; combined with a tossed salad it will be a perfect meal.

Gnocchi di Polenta con Parmigiano, Burro e Prosciutto

These are a refreshing change from regular gnocci, and will be an excellent wintery first course, or go well with a roast.

Frittelle di Polenta alla Lodigiana

Tasty polenta fritters filled with prosciutto and cheese. The perfect tidbit!

Polenta Pasticciata alla Lombarda

A rich baked polenta with cheese that will help keep the chill of winter at bay.

Polenta Pasticciata con le Salsicce

Baked polenta with sausages, a tasty alternative for a quick luncheon, or a simple dinner.

Polenta Pastizada Trionfo Friulana

An extraordinarily rich baked polenta, a perfect centerpiece for a festive meal.

Polenta Pasticciata alla Milanese

A rich, elegant baked polenta dish with meat and mushrooms to keep winter at bay.

Bue Brasato con Gnocchi di Polenta

Elegant braised beef with polenta as a side dish.

Polenta Col Sugo di Coniglio

Polenta with stewed rabbit, an extremely tasty one-course meal.

Cinghiale fra Due Fuochi

Wild boar (or other game) marinated and stewed with the marinade, will work beautifully with polenta

Polenta Col Sugo di Coniglio

Polenta with stewed rabbit, an extremely tasty one-course meal.

Ingredients:

- A rabbit, chopped into eight pieces
- The rabbit's liver, or a chicken liver, minced (optional)
- An ounce of pancetta, minced (optional)
- A small stock of celery, minced
- A small onion, minced
- A small carrot, minced
- A bunch of parsley, minced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- A half a cup tomato sauce
- Salt and pepper
- Boiling water as necessary
- Polenta, either store-bought or made following the directions below

Preparation:

To begin with the polenta, you will need about a pound and a half to feed 4. If you buy it, heat it over a double boiler or in a microwave oven when the sauce is near done. If you're making it, follow the instructions on the [polenta page](#).

What to do with the rabbit? Begin by washing it and patting it dry.

Mince the rabbit's liver, pancetta, onion, celery, carrot, and parsley, and sauté the mixture in the olive oil over a medium flame till the onion's translucent. Season to taste and add the rabbit pieces, stirring often till they've browned. Then sprinkle

the rabbit with water and the tomato sauce and reduce the heat. Gently simmer the rabbit till it's cooked (at least an hour), adding more water if necessary to keep the sauce from drying out.

While the rabbit's cooking, prepare the polenta per the link above. When the polenta is done, turn it out on a cutting board (in Northern Italy people use wooden disks about 18 inches across for this) and serve the polenta in slices, using a taut thread to cut them, with the rabbit, and another vegetable on the side. In this case there will be no need for a first course.

This recipe also works very well with pappardelle, the inch-wide wavy strips of pasta popular in the area between Arezzo and Siena (Tuscany). When the rabbit's almost done set a pound of pasta to boil in lightly salted water (no polenta in this case). Use most of the sauce, along with some grated cheese, to season the pasta, and serve the rabbit with the remaining sauce as a second course, with the vegetable that you prefer and a tossed salad.

Note: you can also make polenta or pappardelle with hare or boar. Hare is tougher than rabbit, and usually requires marinating. Make the marinade by bringing three cups of water to boil with a half cup of vinegar, a couple of laurel leaves, one or two minced shallots, a bunch of parsley, and salt and pepper to taste. Boil the mixture for five minutes. Once it is cool, pour it over the meat, and let the meat stand in the refrigerator for 12 to 16 hours. The same marinade will work well with wild boar; figure about a pound of boar, and marinate it for 16 hours before cooking it per the instructions above.

The wine? A moderately aged Chianti Ruffina would be nice, as would a Carmignano, or a Brunello, or a Barolo.

Yield: 4 servings polenta or pasta with stewed rabbit.

Scallops on Polenta with Mushrooms

Serving Size: 4

Preparation Time: 6:00 due to the chilling of the polenta.

The Polenta

- 1 cup milk, boiled
- 3/4 cup stone-ground corn meal
- A pinch salt
- 1/4 cup sun-dried tomatoes, chopped
- 2 whole green onions, white and green parts chopped
- 1 clove roasted garlic, mashed or minced
- Good, though not peppery olive oil

The Scallops

- 4 large sea scallops
- Kosher salt

The Sauce

- 1/2 cup chicken soup
- 1/4 cup morels, dry, or any mushroom
- 1/4 cup porcini mushrooms, dry (must use porcini)
- 1/2 cup crimini mushrooms, thick sliced (fresh -- must use these)
- 1/4 cup Marsala wine
- 2 tablespoons butter (very cold)

To make the polenta: boil the milk and add the salt. Slowly stir in the cornmeal and stir for 8 minutes adding a little more milk if needed to correct the consistency. Then add the tomatoes, scallions and garlic and stir one more minute.

Grease a 9 by 9 inch pan and pour the polenta into it. Spray a spatula with a non-stick vegetable spray and smooth the top. Cover the polenta with plastic wrap and chill it until it is firm and cool.

When you are ready to serve, you need to cut the polenta into nice-sized triangles large enough to hold the scallop as a base on the plate and still stick out a little beyond the scallop. So, cut the polenta into triangles, remove them from the pan, and paint both sides with the olive oil (or use just plain vegetable oil). Heat a grill pan to hot and grill each side of the polenta so grill marks show and the polenta has a grilled, charred smoky taste. Place the slices on the plate.

Salt the scallops on the top and place them, salt side down, into a hot dry non-stick pan. Salt the up side. When the scallops are seared then turn once and sear the other side. When done remove from the pan and place atop the polenta.

In the same pan the scallops were seared in, pour the chicken soup, mushrooms and Marsala wine. Cook to freshen the mushrooms and slightly reduce the liquid, then stir in the cold butter as a binding agent that will thicken the sauce as well as enrich it. Spoon the sauce and mushrooms over the scallops and polenta.

Garnish with chopped fresh anything green you have around such as parsley, chervil, chives, green onion tops or even something as strong a flavor as thyme leaves would work and not detract. NO rosemary however. I served it a couple times with chive spears crossed on top or stuck into the scallops in holes I made with toothpicks first. It gave the dish further height and dramatic presentation. Chives placed around the polenta also look nice.