

INSIDE ITALY: GREAT TASTE OF ROMAN COOKING

# Tastes of Italia

THE BEST IN ITALIAN COOKING

DECEMBER 2011

## THE DESSERT ISSUE

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TASTY RECIPES

## Chef's Choice

5 Italian Chefs Cook Up  
Their Favorite Dessert  
For The Holidays



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## PROSECCO

CELEBRATE WITH A SPARKLE

DECEMBER 2011



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# ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

When visitors traveled to Rome, their culinary traditions became part of the dynamic Roman cuisine.

See what they brought to the table.

[ By Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli ]



A ll roads lead to Rome. These were the great words of Alian de Lille circa 1175, “Mille viae ducunt homines per saecula Romam,” in classical Latin. A French theologian and poet, his sentiments literally translated to ‘a thousand roads lead men forever to Rome.’ In 1391 Geoffrey Chaucer, poet and writer, translated the Medieval phrase into English.

Throughout time pilgrims, traders, philosophers, and pious populations of every kind flocked to Rome. Its cuisine was highly influenced by the Greeks, and also expanded upon by the Romans. The Roman Empire had a presence in England, Wales, Spain, France, Greece, the Middle East and the North African coastal region, and during that time Romans were exposed to new and different foods and cooking techniques. They returned to their homeland bringing newfound foods with them. The converging of cultures, people and food created a melting pot of what we know today as Roman cuisine.

During the Renaissance, Rome became the epicenter of gastronomy. In 1570 the city already had a celebrity chef, Bartolomeo Scappi. From the Vatican kitchen, he was making headlines for his new style of cooking during the Renaissance under the reign of Pope Pius IV. His cookbook, *Opera dell'art del Cucinare*, includes a compilation of 1,000 recipes including an illustration of the first known fork. He used new ingredients that were being imported to Rome during that time. Scappi was often hailed as ‘the Michelangelo of the kitchen.’

Here to tell us about the historical impact that travelers and traders had on Roman cuisine is Chef Eugenio Rossi. Chef Rossi, an expert in Roman cooking and third generation restaurant owner, tells the story of the Eternal City's cuisine as he takes me through his kitchen. “Roman cuisine is simple and consists of the one basic principle: ‘All of Europe contributed to Rome's cuisine. During the Holy Years many people came to Rome and remained in Rome. They never left. These travelers, pilgrims and traders brought with them their experiences and ways of cooking to the Eternal City. In Roman cooking there is a layering of cultures, food types, and styles which bring us to Roman cuisine as we know it today.’”

Roman cuisine is so vast that it is impossible to describe it in a few words. However, foods like *Acciughe marinate al finocchio selvatico*, small bluefish marinated with fennel; *Saltimbocca alla Romana*, milk-fed veal

**TOP CHEF:** Eugenio Rossi is an expert in the history of Roman cuisine and its many influences. His family has been in the restaurant business since 1928.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY LAUREN BIRMINGHAM PISCITELLI





**TREVI FOUNTAIN:** Legend says if visitors toss a coin in the famous fountain, they are sure to return to Rome.



sautéed in white wine and with Prosciutto and sage; Vitello Picata, milk-fed veal floured, sautéed in olive oil and deglazed in white wine; Coda alla vaccinara, ox or veal tail slow-cooked with carrots and lots of celery; Polpettine Alla Romana, small meatballs made with a mix of ground beef and veal then stuffed with green olives rolled in bread crumbs and flash fried or baked, and Crostata Di Visciole, a golden baked pasta frolla filled with whipped fresh Ricotta topped black cherry marmalade are Roman foods that never go out of style.

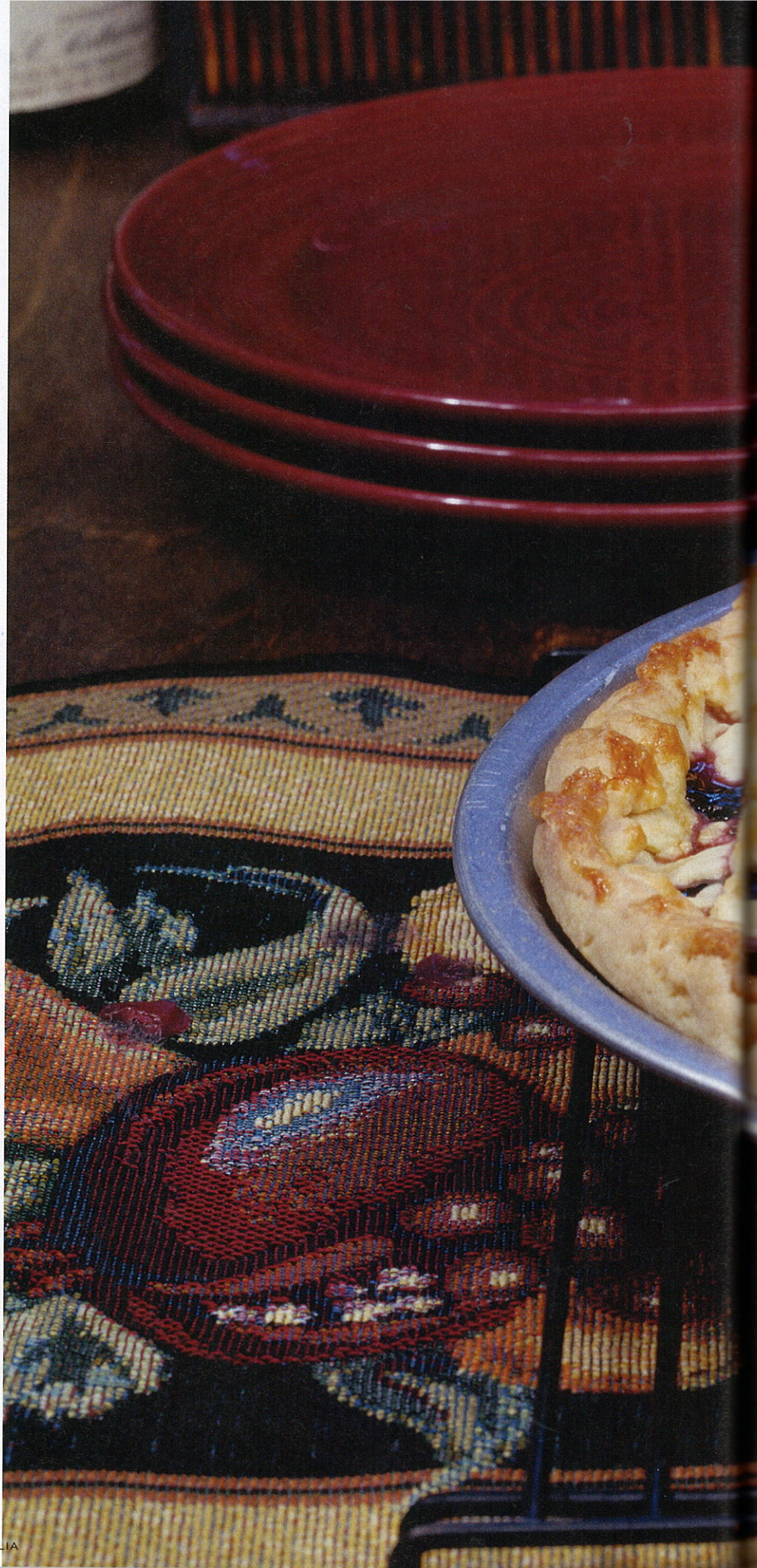
Chef Rossi goes on to say, "Another big influence came from the Jewish community, who have always been in Rome since the ancient Romans. Even Saint Paul was Jewish. But a change happened in 1555 when Pope Paul IV implemented the Cum nimis absurdum or the Bull. As a result of this document, the Roman Ghetto was established. The new law discriminated against the Jews and kept them inside the Ghetto walls. During that period Queen Isabella of Spain and the Aragonese from Sicily were deporting the Jewish people out of her kingdom; they fled to Rome and with them they brought the Sephardic cooking style to the Ghetto in Rome."

The Sephardic, or Mediterranean, and often called, Oriental, way of cooking included the use of dried grapes, sugar, pine nuts and honey. Salt was used to preserve blue fish and buffalo meat, while a vinegar, sugar and wine must were used as a dressing. This cooking style made its way out of the Ghetto and into the traditional Roman kitchen.

Chef Rossi tells, "every food story is a social story that is related to the social life of that moment. Remember the ancient Romans, like Tiberio were eating lots of soups with beans and chickpeas, along with roasted and marinated fish and meat. They were eating a condiment called garum, originally Greek, made from fish, salt and vinegar. This sauce was a concentrate that was sun-dried and very strong. And through the centuries these foods changed."

"Sgombro-mackerel, merluzzo-cod fish and alici-anchovies, were the Jewish poor man's food that developed into much appreciated Roman food delicacies," Chef Eugenio explains, as he points out his daily catch from the Testaccio market which is plump orate, sea bass on ice.

As we make our way through the kitchen, he picks up an artichoke and explains, "the artichoke has been in Rome for centuries and was once called cynara, however it was the Jewish community who made it popular. The Carciofi alla Guidia, a floured and fried artichoke, is now a delicious Jewish specialty of





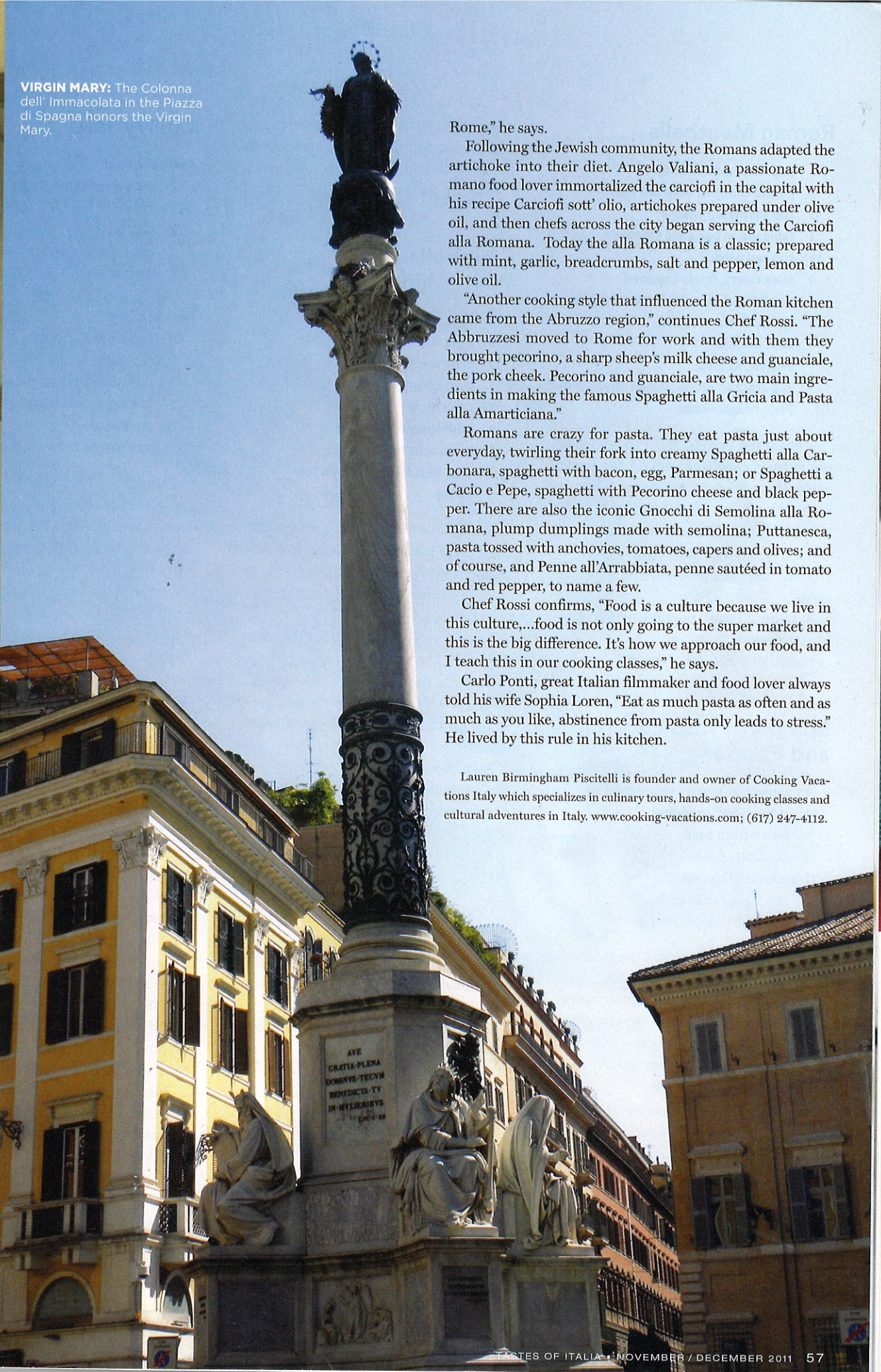
AT HOME



**SOME CRUST:** Sisters Siena and Chloe pat some pizza dough during a cooking class with Chef Eugenio Rossi in Rome.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY LAUREN BIRMINGHAM PISCITELLI





**VIRGIN MARY:** The Colonna dell' Immacolata in the Piazza di Spagna honors the Virgin Mary.

Rome," he says.

Following the Jewish community, the Romans adapted the artichoke into their diet. Angelo Valiani, a passionate Romano food lover immortalized the carciofi in the capital with his recipe *Carciofi sott' olio*, artichokes prepared under olive oil, and then chefs across the city began serving the *Carciofi alla Romana*. Today the *alla Romana* is a classic; prepared with mint, garlic, breadcrumbs, salt and pepper, lemon and olive oil.

"Another cooking style that influenced the Roman kitchen came from the Abruzzo region," continues Chef Rossi. "The Abbruzzesi moved to Rome for work and with them they brought pecorino, a sharp sheep's milk cheese and guanciale, the pork cheek. Pecorino and guanciale, are two main ingredients in making the famous *Spaghetti alla Gricia* and *Pasta alla Amarticana*."

Romans are crazy for pasta. They eat pasta just about everyday, twirling their fork into creamy *Spaghetti alla Carbonara*, spaghetti with bacon, egg, Parmesan; or *Spaghetti a Cacio e Pepe*, spaghetti with Pecorino cheese and black pepper. There are also the iconic *Gnocchi di Semolina alla Romana*, plump dumplings made with semolina; *Puttanesca*, pasta tossed with anchovies, tomatoes, capers and olives; and of course, and *Penne all'Arrabbiata*, penne sautéed in tomato and red pepper, to name a few.

Chef Rossi confirms, "Food is a culture because we live in this culture,...food is not only going to the super market and this is the big difference. It's how we approach our food, and I teach this in our cooking classes," he says.

Carlo Ponti, great Italian filmmaker and food lover always told his wife Sophia Loren, "Eat as much pasta as often and as much as you like, abstinence from pasta only leads to stress." He lived by this rule in his kitchen.

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## Roman Meatballs

- ½ pound chopped sirloin**
- ½ pound chopped milk-fed veal**
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese**
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar**
- ½ cup red wine**
- 1 stalk celery, finely chopped**
- 1 small bunch parsley, finely chopped**
- ½ onion, finely chopped**
- Salt, to taste**
- Pepper, to taste**
- 1 cup cracked green Sicilian olives, pitted**
- Plain breadcrumbs**

Preheat the oven to 350°F, or you may opt to fry in canola oil until golden brown.

Mix all ingredients, except the olives and breadcrumbs, in a bowl. Form small balls by molding meat around one green olive. Once firm, roll the meatball in breadcrumbs, making sure it is thoroughly covered.

Bake for 20 to 30 minutes or until golden brown.

Makes 20 1-inch meatballs.

## Spaghetti with Pecorino and Pepper

- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil**
- 1 clove garlic, squashed**
- 1 bunch fresh basil**
- ¼ cup white wine**
- 12 ounces of spaghetti**
- Black pepper, to taste**
- Pecorino cheese, grated**

In a large frying pan, add the olive oil, garlic and basil. Over medium heat, cook until the garlic is translucent, then bathe with the white wine. Allow the wine to evaporate without stirring. Remove the garlic and basil and discard and set aside the flavored olive oil.

Meanwhile, cook the spaghetti in boiling, salted water until al dente. Drain and save a little of the pasta water. Pour drained spaghetti into the flavored olive oil and add a generous amount of ground black pepper, the grated Pecorino cheese, and a scoop of the pasta water. Toss together for a moment or two over high heat to combine then serve hot.

Variation: For a stronger flavor, you can add the pepper to the garlic and basil at the beginning to sauté in the olive oil.

Makes 4 servings.

## Ciambella with White Wine

- 2½ cups sugar**
- 1⅔ cups white wine**
- 1⅔ cups vegetable oil**
- 6⅔ cups all-purpose flour**
- ⅓ cup raisins**
- 3½ tablespoons pine nuts**
- 2 teaspoons fennel seeds**
- 1 egg, beaten, to brush on top**
- Sugar**

Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, combine the ingredients, except the beaten egg and sugar, and mix to create a smooth dough. Allow to rest about one hour before using.

Roll out coils of about 10 inches each, then press the ends together to form rings. Place them at least 1 inch apart on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Brush with beaten egg and sprinkle with a little sugar.

Bake about 35 minutes until golden. Remove from oven and allow to cool completely before serving. Served at the end of the meal, break the rings and dip in wine. Store in an airtight container.

Makes 36 servings.

## Roman Egg Soup

- 1 quart chicken broth or beef stock**
- 4 eggs**
- 1½ tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper**
- ¼ cup chopped parsley**

Bring the chicken broth to a boil. In a separate bowl, mix the eggs, cheese, salt and pepper until well blended. Slowly add the egg mixture to the broth, stirring constantly. Simmer for 5 minutes. Top with chopped parsley and serve hot.

Makes 4 servings.

## Cherry Tart

For the pastry:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour**
- 2 eggs**
- 2 egg yolks**
- 1 cup butter, room temperature**
- 1⅓ cups sugar**

For the filling:

- 28 ounces fresh ricotta**
- 1 cup sugar**
- 21 ounces cherry marmalade**
- 3 to 4 tablespoons water to dilute the marmalade**
- 1 egg beaten to brush on top**

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Pour the flour onto a work surface and make a well in the center. Add the eggs, egg yolks, butter and sugar to the well and work the dough to form a smooth, compact pastry. Cover with a damp cotton cloth or plastic wrap and allow to rest in the refrigerator for at least one hour before using.

Mix the ricotta with the sugar until smooth. Set aside. Place the cherry marmalade in a separate bowl and add 3 to 4 tablespoons of water to dilute it.

Divide the pastry dough in half and roll out half of the dough with a rolling pin until about 1/8-inch thick. Grease a 12-inch pie tin, with sides at least 1½ inches high. Carefully place the pastry into the pie tin and cut off any extra that goes beyond the edge. Pour in the ricotta mixture, then the diluted cherry marmalade.

Roll out the other half of the pastry, thinner than the first, to about 1/16 inch. Make a lattice crust by cutting pastry into 3/4-inch strips. Carefully place strips on top of the pie tin, weave together, and cut off any extra that goes beyond the edge. Brush a little beaten egg on the crust.

Bake about 40 minutes until golden. Remove from the oven and allow to cool completely before serving.

Makes 12 servings.





**HOT SPAGHETTI:** The pasta is combined with Pecorino cheese and freshly ground pepper to make a delicious dish.