



THE
SEVEN OR
EIGHT RECIPES
OF
STELLA
FORTUNA



RECIPES



ASSUNTA'S EGGPLANT CUTLETS

(Do Not Leave Unattended Near Small Children!)

TINA'S LITTLE MEATBALL SOUP

(No One Will Know Which Meatballs You Made)

ASSUNTA'S AMERICAN SUNDAY SAUCE

(Raù)

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(Don't Make This—It's a Terrible Recipe)

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ASSUNTA'S EGGPLANT CUTLETS

(Do Not Leave Unattended Near Small Children!)

Eggplant cutlets on their own often feature on Calabrese hot antipasto platters, but they are also the main component of one of the most perfect meals of all time, eggplant parmigiana. I don't blame Assunta for craving them, although if you make this recipe, please don't let any small children tip over your frying pan onto themselves the way Stella did.

I've added a very American extra step here: the salting of the eggplant slices at the beginning of the recipe, which takes away the bitterness. Assunta didn't have that kind of salt to spare—salt was a precious and necessary preservative as well as a taxed commodity, and Assunta never had any money. But if you don't mind a little anachronistic cheating, the salting will make the eggplant extra delicious.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 eggplant, preferably the thin, sweet Italian varietal
- Salt
- ½ cup flour
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 cup breadcrumbs
- Olive oil

DIRECTIONS:

1. Slice the eggplant into medallions as thin as you can get them—I love using smaller, sweeter eggplants that can be sliced into quarter-inch-thick rounds.
2. Place a colander on a bowl to catch drippings and put the eggplant slices in the colander. Salt the slices generously on both sides, then let them rest in the colander for thirty minutes. Then rinse the salt off the eggplant and press out what moisture you can—I, like Assunta, use my fingers, but some people use paper towels.
3. Set up your dredging bowls: first one bowl with your flour in it, then one with the beaten egg, and finally one with the breadcrumbs. If any of these bowls starts running low, refill as needed.
4. Heat a skillet over medium-high and when it's hot add two tablespoons of olive oil. When the oil is hot, you're ready to start dredging and frying.
5. Take a piece of eggplant, dredge it lightly in the flour, then give it a quick dip in the egg, drenching both sides, and finally get it good and covered in breadcrumbs. Drop the eggplant into the hot oil and let it cook as you keep dredging and dropping other slices. After two minutes or so, depending on thickness, turn the slices over—they should be browning and crispy. Cook for the same length on the other side, then remove from the pan and place on a paper towel-covered plate so they may drain. If your oil is blackened or smoky with fallen breadcrumbs, wipe out the skillet between batches and add fresh oil.

ASSUNTA'S EGGPLANT CUTLETS CONT.

6. Serve hot, if you can. Luckily these are really easy to keep warm and yummy in the oven at 200°F, so they can be made ahead of time.

TIP:

Assunta's recipe is very simple—she didn't have much to work with in levoli. But you can add some easy modern elements to spice it up: great parmesan cheese into the breadcrumbs, or add dried oregano, garlic powder, or black pepper. Serve with marinara or parmesan cheese. Or just eat 'em like potato chips.



TINA'S LITTLE MEATBALL SOUP

(No One Will Know Which Meatballs You Made)

You might have seen this recipe on American menus as “Italian Wedding Soup,” but any Italian American will tell you we don't eat this at weddings. It is, however, popular at Christmas.

Auntie Tina makes her own chicken stock for this soup: she takes three whole chickens, stuffs them into an enormous stock pot, and boils the heck out of them to extract every molecule of chickenness from them. Then, considering the carcasses unusable for human consumption, she removes the chicken from the stock, shreds the meat, and packs it into ziplock bags to give to her nieces to feed to their dogs. I share this process with you in case you want to add a whole extra level of nonna-ness to your execution of this recipe.

Some recipe authenticity notes: Auntie Tina's real recipe is for six times this volume, because that's the only way she ever cooks. And I have no advice for you on how to master rolling these meatballs. Mine have never passed muster. Buona fortuna.

INGREDIENTS:

FOR THE LITTLE MEATBALLS:

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 pound ground pork
- 6-10 cloves of garlic, chopped very finely (don't use a garlic press)
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup breadcrumbs
- ¾ cup grated parmesan cheese
- Handful of fresh parsley, chopped
- Olive oil

FOR THE SOUP:

- Olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 10 cups chicken broth (you can make your own, ala Tina's above)
- 2 cups escarole or spinach, chopped
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 pound small pasta, like pastina, orzo, or acini di pepe

DIRECTIONS:

1. Combine all the meatball ingredients except olive oil in a big bowl and mix well. Prep a large baking sheet by spreading a thin layer of olive oil over the bottom. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Roll the meatballs: pinch a chunk of meat mix about as big as a grape, and roll quickly with two fingers against the palm of your opposite hand, then

TINA'S LITTLE MEATBALL SOUP CONT.

place them on the prepared baking tray. As you might have already read, my little meatballs have never met with approval. But here's my advice: keep a small bowl of water near your hand so you can rinse your palm if the rolling starts to get gummy. When the tray is full, bake for 15 minutes, then set them aside.

3. Make the soup: put a large pot on the stove over medium-high heat, then add a couple tablespoons of olive oil. When it's hot, add the onions and carrots and sauté them until they're soft, 3 or 4 minutes. Add the chicken broth and bring to a light boil. Add the little meatballs and let cook for another 10 minutes. Stir in the escarole or spinach. Once it has wilted, slowly add the egg, stirring the broth constantly as you do so, so it flakes into the broth and doesn't cook into one lump.
4. Add the pasta. If you're lazy like me, you just dump it into the soup and cook for another 5 minutes or so (depending on the cooking time of the particular pasta you've chosen). Auntie Tina, however, cooks the pasta separately and ladles it separately into individual bowls, then serves the soup on top—she does this so that if there are leftovers (which there always are; she only cooks in enormous batches) the pasta won't get mushy. Serve with parmesan to grate on top.



ASSUNTA'S SUNDAY SAUCE (Raù)

For Italian Americans, there is no more important recipe than the quintessential Sunday sauce. Especially in first- and second-generation families, Sunday was sacred gathering time for children, grandchildren, aunts and uncles, cousins, god-parents, and other family members (the definition of which, for Italians, is flexible).

Vegetarians beware. When Assunta first came to America, she had never eaten beef in her life, and had only ever tasted chicken once a year, on Christmas. In America, where meat was so plentiful, she made up for all those lost years of unwilling vegetarianism. In a last measure to overcompensate for the privation of her single mother years in levoli, Assunta would add yet another source of protein to her American Sunday sauce: she would crack eggs onto the top about half an hour before she was serving it and let them poach—as many as a dozen eggs, when she used her biggest pot.

The secret to homemade sauce, though, is that there is no secret to it. Almost any variation you make, even a quick and dirty version, will be delicious, even if you don't have all afternoon to let it bubble so the flavors mingle, the way Assunta would have wanted you to. Empower yourself with a nice basic recipe and you'll never use jarred sauce again! If you're doing a quick version, skip the meat components—they are what take the most time.

INGREDIENTS:

FOR THE SAUCE:

- Olive oil
- 10-12 cloves garlic, sliced (or more, why not overdo it?)
- 2 28-ounce cans whole peeled tomatoes
- 1 6-ounce can tomato paste
- Water
- 1 carrot
- Piece old parmesan rind (if you have one lying in the back of your cheese drawer)
- ½ to ¾ cup red wine (if you have the end of an old bottle, that's perfect. Or if you have to open a new bottle, so be it.)
- Red pepper flakes (optional)

ENORMOUS MEATBALLS, FOR WHICH YOU'LL NEED:

- 1 pound ground beef
- 6 cloves garlic, chopped (or more—why not overdo it again?)
- 2 eggs
- ½ a cup breadcrumbs
- 1 cup grated parm—grate your own if you can, it will taste way better
- handful of fresh chopped parsely
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ pound hot or sweet Italian sausages

ASSUNTA'S SUNDAY SAUCE

CONT.

SERVE WITH:

- Pasta (I suggest a long, thick noodle, like fettuccine or tagliatelle, for maximum surface area to absorb the sauce)
- A block of parmesan cheese to grate over the top

DIRECTIONS:

1. Put your second-biggest pot on the stove over medium-high heat. (You're going to need the biggest one to cook the pasta in later. I've never really understood this rule, but I'm not here to argue with Auntie Tina.) Add a couple tablespoons of olive oil, then when it's hot, add the garlic. Stir periodically with your wooden spoon until the garlic softens.
2. Add your two cans of peeled tomatoes. You can either crush them now by hand as you add them—a little messy, but therapeutic—or crush them (carefully!) in the pot with your wooden spoon (watch out, they squirt). Add the tomato paste. Then swish some water around in the empty cans to get the good stuff out, then dump the water in the pot to loosen up the sauce. Stir with that wooden spoon again.
3. Chop your carrot into three big chunks and toss in the pot—it will add a hint of sweetness and will take some of the acidity out of the tomato. (In my husband's family, they use a tablespoon of sugar instead of a carrot; they are philistines, but do what makes you happy.) Toss in your parm rind—it will add a little saltiness and texture. Dump in your wine. If you like some spiciness, add red pepper flakes to your taste at this point. (In Calabria, they just serve whole, raw chili peppers along with the pasta, and you take bites of them as you eat—I wish this tradition had emigrated to the States with my ancestors and am on a mission to reintroduce it, but it's a little hard core for some people.)
4. Bring the whole thing to a bubble, then turn the heat down to low, cover, and let it thicken up. Assunta would have left it on all day. Stir periodically so the bottom doesn't burn—if it starts to get too thick, add a little more water.
5. Now make your meatballs. Mix all the meatball ingredients (beef, garlic, eggs, breadcrumbs, grated parm, parsley) with your hand in a big bowl. (My husband's family puts milk in their meatballs—philistines, as I mentioned. But again, make yourself happy, and if your mix is feeling a little thick a splash of milk is admittedly an acceptable way to loosen it up.) Heat up a skillet and add enough olive oil to thinly cover the bottom (two tablespoons should do it). Form meatballs—I like to make them about the size of an egg—and drop them in the pan. Let them cook for 2-3 minutes until the bottom is brown, then turn them, then turn them again, etc., until they are

browned all over to seal in that juicy cheesiness. When they are done, drop them in the big pot of sauce. You'll need to let them cook all the way through, so make sure they have at least 30 minutes in there.

6. Now for the sausage. Rinse out that skillet and heat it up again, add your sausage, and let them brown a little on each side. Then drop them in the sauce. They, too, will need at least 30 minutes to cook through.
7. Serve with pasta and grate that parm over the top.



TINA'S ANGEL WINGS

(Chiacchiere)

Angel wings, or chiacchiere, are unavoidable at Calabrese-American wedding and baby showers. They are a light, crispy, and not overly sweet cookie that piles voluminously and impressively on decorative platters—great for making a gift table look festive.

You'll need a pasta machine for this recipe (or you can roll by hand, but that's a whole lot of work, and besides, you'll probably want to get a pasta machine if you don't already have one, because how else can you make fresh pasta?). In fact, this whole recipe is just a variation on a pasta recipe—think of an angel wing as a deep-fried, sugar-dusted pasta.

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 eggs
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups flour, plus more for dusting
- Lots of vegetable oil for deep frying
- Powdered sugar for dusting

DIRECTIONS:

1. Mix the eggs, baking powder, vanilla, and salt until smooth.
2. Add the flour a half a cup at a time until a dry, barely sticky dough comes together (it will be approximately the consistency of fresh pasta dough, if you have experience with that). Roll the dough into a ball, flour the exterior, and wrap tightly in plastic wrap. Let the dough rest for an hour.
3. Cut the dough into quarters and work with one piece at a time. First, pass the dough through the pasta maker, starting at the 0 setting and progressing up to the 4 setting. (Or roll out by hand into a 1/8-inch thick rectangle.)
4. Lay the rectangle on a floured surface and cut into rhombus shapes with a ridged pastry cutter (or a plain knife will do in a pinch). Cut a slit in the middle of each rhombus, then pull one corner of the rhombus through its own slit so the dough forms a bow-tie twist.
5. Pour two inches of vegetable oil into a pot or deep fryer over high heat. When the oil is good and hot, drop the bow-tied pieces of dough in. You can do more than one at a time, but don't let them touch in the oil. Fry until the dough puffs up and turns golden brown, then pull them out and lay them on paper towels or baking racks to drip and cool. If the oil starts to get dark—which will happen as loose flour dusting comes off in oil—you'll need to change it out so your angel wings don't burn.
6. When the angel wings are completely cool, dust generously with powdered sugar.

TINA'S CHOCOLATE COOKIES

(Totò)

This recipe was extraordinarily hard to put together, in part because Auntie Tina, who makes these cookies every year for Christmas, is incredibly close-lipped about what goes into them. She will invite you over to watch her bake them so you can learn and keep the tradition alive, but then she will secretly add or swap ingredients like a mind-muddling sorceress—dare I suggest sabotage your efforts, so you can never tell the world her secrets?—and it is almost impossible to leave her house with a usable recipe.

After much research and experimentation, I have come up with this recipe, which approximates hers, although they'll never be perfect. Also, her recipe makes 8 times this volume.

INGREDIENTS:

- ¼ pound shortening
- ½ cup cocoa powder
- 3 ½ cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon cloves
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- ½ pound raisins, chopped
- ½ cup cold coffee
-

FOR DECORATING:

- Confectioners' sugar
- Vanilla
- Milk
- Food coloring (optional—we always use green)
- Rainbow nonpareils sprinkles

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Combine all the cookie ingredients except the coffee in a large bowl. Add the coffee a little at a time, mixing well.
3. Roll into balls about an inch and a half in diameter and line them up on an ungreased baking tray. Bake 10-12 minutes.
4. When they come out of the oven, let them cool completely before you frost.
5. For the frosting: this extra step is recommended, because the frosting will seal in the moisture and help this dense cookie last on your dessert platters throughout the long holiday cookie-ing season. To make the frosting, put

TINA'S CHOCOLATE COOKIES CONT.

about a cup of confectioners' sugar in a large bowl. Add the wet ingredients a drop at a time to get the right consistency—when you dip a spoon in it, the icing should drip slowly from the bottom. Start with a few drops of vanilla, then a tablespoon or so of milk, and whisk with your spoon, then add a few more drops of milk at a time.

6. Set up your decorating area: spread paper towels over your table to catch drips, then line up cooling racks on top. Frost the cookies by dipping the round top in the frosting bowl, then using your finger to smooth the icing all over. Don't forget the bottom; you want to seal the cookie all over to lock in moisture. Place on the drying racks and sprinkle the nonpareils on top immediately so they stick. Since finger-frosting is so messy, it's great to have a buddy help you with the sprinkles.

STELLA'S BOILED CHICKEN

(Don't Make This—It's a Terrible Recipe)

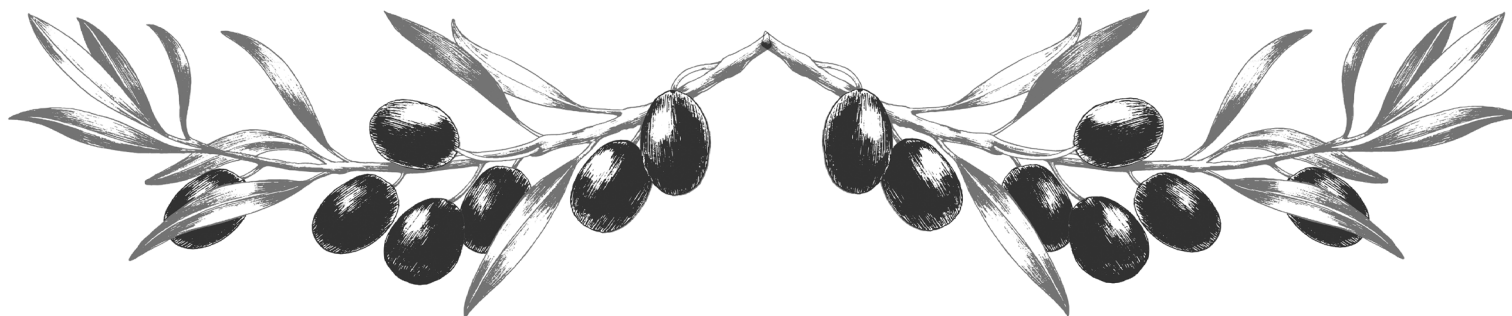
The seventh time Stella almost dies, it's because she breaks her own lifelong rule and tries to cook herself dinner. Save your life! Don't make the mistake Stella did!

INGREDIENTS:

- Pot of water
- 1 supermarket-wrapped package of assorted chicken parts

DIRECTIONS:

1. Put a pot of water on to boil.
2. When it is beyond any shadow of a doubt boiling, drop the chicken parts one by one into the water.
3. If you're as bad a cook as Stella is, you'll have no way of knowing when the chicken is cooked, so wait an extra long time to be sure. While you're waiting, you can opt to drink way too much wine.
4. Try not to choke as you eat.



ASSUNTA'S ORANGE CAKE

(Unwanted Marriage Proposals Not Included)

During my childhood, at any given nonna's house there was always a yellowish cake of some variety (pound, lemon, angel food, almond, etc.) sitting somewhere near the table so it might be unwrapped in a hurry and foisted upon any guest, expected or unexpected, even if said guest had turned down a full hot meal. (You don't escape an Italian nonna's house without eating something.) Cakes like these last several days on your counter as long as they're well wrapped, or for weeks in your freezer.

Here's an orange variation, which Assunta serves to Carmelo when he tries to propose to Stella on Palm Sunday. Assunta would have used plain old vegetable oil, but for a fragrant modern twist you might substitute extra virgin olive oil, instead. I suggest baking in a bundt pan; it will be much more Italian-looking with a hole in the middle.

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 extra-large eggs
- 1 ½ cups sugar
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 cup orange juice
- Zest from 1 large organic orange
- 3 cups flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Powdered sugar to decorate

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Butter a bundt pan really well, making sure you don't miss any of the nooks and crannies, then lightly flour it.
2. In a large bowl, mix the eggs and sugar until they are well combined. Add the oil, orange juice, and zest.
3. In a separate bowl, mix the flour, baking powder, and salt. Stir the dry mixture a bit at a time into the wet mixture, being careful not to overmix it.
4. When you have one smooth, combined batter, use a spatula to gently scrape it into the greased pan. Bake for 45 minutes, or until the cake passes the clean toothpick test.
5. Turn the cake out of the pan onto the cooling rack and let it cool completely. Dust with powdered sugar. Serve with coffee or wine, whatever mood your guests are in.

SEPINESE LIMONCELLO

(Watch Out, It's Strong)

I learned this recipe in Sepino from a very sweet third cousin named Mariangelo. I've seen a lot of recipes that are more work than his, but in my opinion none of those recipes tastes better than his. Plan ahead: this takes 30 days! And be warned: it's sweet and delicious, but it packs a powerful punch!

INGREDIENTS:

- 14 organic lemons (organic is important, since you're using the skin and you don't want any residual waxy or chemical flavors)
- 1 liter of grain alcohol, like Everclear (you can also use vodka)
- 3 ½ cups white sugar
- 4 cups water

DIRECTIONS:

1. Wash the lemons to get off any non-lemon flavors.
2. With a vegetable peeler, peel the zest off the lemons, taking care to make your peels shallow. They should be only yellow zest, no white pith—the white pith will make your limoncello bitter.
3. Open your bottle of grain alcohol and stuff those lemon peels right in there. Cork the bottle back up good and tight and leave it in a room-temperature corner to infuse for four weeks.
4. When the month has passed and the grain alcohol has taken on a nice yellow tinge, make some simple syrup: combine the sugar and the water in a saucepan and heat until the sugar is dissolved. Let the syrup cool to room temperature.
5. Pour the infused alcohol, minus the lemon peels, into the sugar water. Stir.
6. Decant the mixture into two sealable one-liter glass bottles. Seal them tightly and let them rest in your room-temperature corner for two days. Then pop them in the freezer or the fridge to get cold before you serve.

TIP:

This recipe uses only the lemon peel, not the lemons. If you don't have an immediate need for 14 lemons, consider juicing them into an ice cube tray so they don't go to waste. Then pop a lemon ice cube any old time you want to make yourself a glass of lemonade or need some fresh lemon juice for a recipe.

