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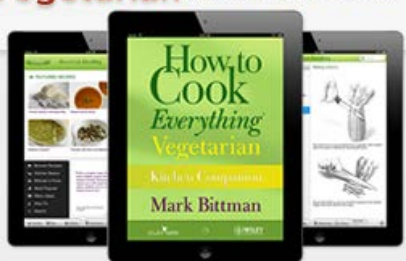

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Robert Iulo

Pasta Con Sarde

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Pasta Con Sarde

By Robert Iulo, from the *Robert Iulo* collection

Introduction

March 19 is the feast day of St. Joseph, when many Sicilian households traditionally serve *pasta con sarde*, or pasta with sardines.

This is my family's Napolitano version of the dish. For the original Siciliano recipe, leave out the tomatoes and add 2 cups of water with ½ teaspoon saffron.

As is traditional with Italian fish sauces, don't serve this dish with cheese.

Ingredients

- 2 heads of fennel (use just the top fronds and save the bulbs for a salad)
- ¼ cup plus 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 large Spanish onion, coarsely chopped
- 2 anchovies
- 2 cans (28 ounces each) San Marzano crushed plum tomatoes
- ¼ cup golden raisins, soaked in warm water
- 1½ lb. fresh sardines (cleaned, filleted, and cut into 2-inch pieces)
- ¼ cup pine nuts
- 1 lb. dried buccatelli pasta
- 1 cup bread crumbs

Steps

1. **Cook the fennel:** Remove the fronds from the stems of the fennel and steam them for about 5 minutes. Chop the leaves finely. Set aside.
2. Cut some of the large fennel stems in a pot of boiling water. Boil for 15 minutes, then discard the stems and reserve one cup of the cooking water for cooking the pasta.
3. **Make the sauce:** Heat ¼ cup of olive oil in a large pot. Add the onions and sauté on medium heat until wilted but not browned. Add the anchovies and then the chopped fennel leaves, and mix well with the onions. Add salt and pepper to taste. Cook for 10 minutes. Add the crushed tomatoes, cover, and cook over medium-low heat for about 1½ hours. Add the raisins. Cook, covered, for another half-hour over medium-low heat.
4. Sauté the sardines in 2 tablespoons of oil, then add them, along with the pine nuts, to the sauce. Cook, uncovered, for half an hour over medium-low heat. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
5. **Cook the pasta:** Cook the buccatelli in 4 quarts of salted water and add the cup of water flavored with the fennel stems.

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Winter radishes

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- Toast the bread crumbs:** While the pasta is cooking, heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a small pan and add the bread crumbs. Stir constantly until they begin to brown, then remove from the heat.
- Assemble and serve the dish:** Place the cooked and drained pasta in a large serving bowl. Top with the sauce and some of the bread crumb mixture. Pass the remaining crumbs and extra sauce at the table.

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