

St. Joseph's Table



INTRODUCTION

Italy has dozens, if not hundreds, of saints' days. Each little town and village, each major city, has its saint, and on the saint's day the town, village or city stops to celebrate and pay thanks. The festivities can take many shapes, from the most purely religious to the most hedonistically secular. Generally, the custom is to welcome one and all, whether a local resident or a casual visitor.

Generally speaking saints' days are more fervently recognized in the south of Italy. Sicily's most important saint is *Giuseppe* (Joseph), Step-father of Jesus, whose day is celebrated on March 19th. Many activities are scheduled, including the very unique called the St. Joseph's Table. This ancient tradition goes back to the Middle Ages. At that time there was an exceptionally severe drought in Sicily. No rain fell for an extended period of time, no crops would grow, and countless people died of famine. The peasants prayed to God for rain, and they also prayed to St. Joseph to intercede with God on their behalf. They promised that if God caused it to rain, they would have a special feast honoring God and St. Joseph.

By miracle, the rains came and the crops were planted. With the harvest, the people prepared a feast of foods from their crops. This has become known as the *Tavola di San Giuseppe* (St. Joseph's Table). Through the centuries, people who have prayed for a "favor" and have been granted the "favor" use this festivity to show their thanks. The "favor" requested must not be for personal gain or benefit. Some common requests are the safe return of a loved one from a war (a very common one during World War II), or that a loved one be cured or survive from a serious, life-threatening illness or accident.

The Table has many forms, depending on the towns' or cities' customs. The focal piece of the Table is a statue of St. Joseph, holding the baby Jesus, complemented by lighted votive candles and stick candles. On the Table are only foods grown by the peasants or found growing wild in the fields: *pasta cca muddica* (honey and breadcrumbs), *cicoria* greens, stuffed artichokes, stuffed eggplants, fresh fennel stalks, battered-fried *cardune*, cauliflower and broccoli, spinach/egg frittatas, fresh oranges, apples, grapes and other fruits in season. Also, displayed in vases are shafts of wheat and spaghetti.

People ask why there is no meat on the Table. This is because, even if the poor peasants could afford meat, it is the Lenten Season, so no meat is used. In the tradition of other towns that were closer to the sea, fish was readily available and fish dishes were used on their Tables. But in towns in the center of Sicily, no fresh fish was available, so none were used.

Sweets that are displayed on a typical Table are: *piccidatti*, *cassateddi*, *pignalatti*, *sfinge*, *scocchi*, *cannoli* and cookies, all created in the styles of the different towns.

Below is a typical Sicilian prayer spoken during the blessing of the Table:

"O, glorious St. Joseph, we stand before this Altar with joyful and grateful hearts. We lovingly present to you the labor of our hands and the dedication of our hearts that have fashioned this Altar in your honor. We again place ourselves under your powerful protection. Help us follow your example of complete trust and faith in The Divine Providence. Open our minds and hearts to love and serve the poor, the suffering and those rejected or ignored by society. As a family, teach us to love and honor each member of our families with the love and reverence you had for Jesus and Mary. As a nation, inspire in us the will and the way to live in peace with all

nations of the world that in our day we can experience the fulfillment of the prayer of Jesus. Peace be to you.

Remember, O most pure spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our sweet protector, St. Joseph, that no one ever had recourse to your protection or implored your aid without obtaining relief.

Lord Jesus, bless this Altar, all this food, the candles, those who prepared it and all those who visit it. We ask this in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of The Holy Spirit.

Amen.”

CONCLUSION

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" Sicilian Gastronomic Specialities "



“Sicilian Gastronomic Specialities”
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PASTA ALLA CARITTERA
(Teamster Pasta)

Ingredients

500 Gr. of Spaghetti
Pecorino Cheese (Sheep's Milk Cheese)
5-6 Garlic Cloves
Salt and Chilly Chips

Cooking Directions:

Boil 500 Gr. of Spaghetti.
Grate Pecorino cheese.
Grate 5-6 garlic cloves.
Dress with salt and chilly chips.

Cooking Time: 10 Minutes

Servings: 4 Persons

PASTA CU LI SARDI
(Pasta With Anchovies)

Ingredients

4 Bunches of Mountain Fennels
500 Gr. Fresh Anchovies
5 Filets of Salted Anchovies
1 Onion
15 Gr. Pine Seeds and Sultanas
1 Pack of Saffron
6 Tablespoons of Olive Oil
500 Gr. Maccheroncini
Salt and Pepper

Cooking Directions:

Wash and Boil Mountain Fennels in Salt Water.
Drain and Keep the Water.
Pound Onion and Brown in Pan with Olive Oil.
Join Salted Anchovies Filets and Pound With Tablespoon.
Join and Brown Fresh Anchovies which should be
Washed, Desquamated and Beheaded.
Join Mountain Fennels, Pine Seeds and Sultanas.
Cook and Join Fennels Water with Saffron.
In Fennels Water Cook Maccheroncini.
Mix with a half of the Prepared Sauce.
Arrange in a Plate.
Pour the rest of the Sauce and serve.

Cooking Time: 25 Minutes

Servings: 4 Persons

PASTA CU L'OVA DI TUNNO
(Spaghetti With Tuna Egg Sauce)

Ingredients

40 Gr. of Minced Tuna Eggs
2 Crushed Garlic Cloves
400 Gr. Spaghetti
Extra Virgin Olive Oil
1 Parsley Sprig
Hot Pepper and Salt

Cooking Directions:

Brown the garlic and add the tuna eggs.

Season with pepper and remove from the heat.

Cook the spaghetti.

Add some of the spaghetti water to the sauce and remove garlic.

When al dente, or just tender, drain the spaghetti.

Transfer to a frying pan with the sauce.

Simmer for about three (3) minutes.

Serve with a sprinkling of parsley.

Cooking Time: 20 Minutes

Servings: 4 Persons

PURPITTUNI

(Big Sausage)

Ingredients

1 Kg of deep ground Beef Meat
100 gr of ground Ripe Cheese (Caciocavallo)
2 Eggs
Onion
Flour
Lemon
Butter
Salt and Pepper

Cooking Directions:

**Mix together in a bowl, 1 kg of deep ground Beef Meat,
100 gr. of Ripe Cheese, 2 eggs, salt and pepper.**
With care and wet hands, make a big well compacted cylinder.
Place onto flour.
Prepare a fried mix with one half of an onion in butter until browned.
Put the big sausage on it, and cook on both sides.
Add one half glass of water and one half spoon of flour.
Mix well, lower the flame and cover.
When cooked, add the juice of a lemon.

Cooking Time: 30 Minutes

Servings: 4 Persons

MPANATA DI PISCI SPATA
(Swordfish Covered With Breadcrumbs)

Ingredients

1 Kg of Flour
½ Glass of Olive Oil
250 Gr. of Tomato Pulp
Sultana Grape
Pine Seeds
Black Olives
Salt and Pepper
100 Gr. of fresh Caciocavallo Cheese

Cooking Directions:

Flour 1 kg of fish and cut into slices.

Fry it in olive oil.

**Spread out a focaccio dough in a baking tin,
completely covering the bottom and the edges.**

**Place on it the fried swordfish slices, ½ glass of olive oil, 250 gr. of tomato pulp,
a celery core finely chopped, a spoon of sultana grape,
a spoon of pine seeds, 10 stoned and crumbled black olives,
salt, pepper and 100 gr. of fresh Caciocavallo cheese cutted into small dices.**

Mix well, then close with a dish of dough, sealing the edges with a light folding.

Place in a hot oven for about 30 minutes.

Cooking Time: 30 Minutes

Servings: 4 Persons

CAPONATA DI MELENZANE

(Eggplant Caponata)

Ingredients

8 Large Eggplants (diced)
400 Gr. Tomato Sauce
250 Gr. Green Olives (stoned)
1 Sprig Celery
150 Gr. of Salted Capers
2 Onions
1 Basil Sprig
40 Gr. Sugar
½ Glass of Vinegar
Salt as needed
Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Cooking Directions:

Keep the diced eggplants in salted water for about one hour.
Drain, dry and fry in a pan.
Meanwhile parboil the chopped celery in water.
Keep the stoned olives in hot water for 10 minutes.
Prepare the tomato sauce in a casserole with two onions and parsley.
Cook the olives, celery and capers in oil until brown.
Add the tomato sauce and dress with sugar and vinegar.
Finally add the eggplants and simmer over low heat for some minutes.
Serve cold.

Cooking Time: 1 Hour

Servings: 6 Persons

INSALATA DI GAMBERI ALLA MENTA
(Mint Flavoured Shrimp Salad)

Ingredients

½ Kg Shrimp
1 Stalk of Celery
1 Spoon of Vinegar
2 Lemons
½ Cup of Olive Oil
Parsley
Leaves of Mint
Salt and Pepper

Cooking Directions:

Marinate all the shrimp for 30 minutes in salted water.
Then put them in a pot with boiling salted water and add the vinegar.
Boil for some minutes.
Shell the shrimp.
Put in bowl with the minced celery, salt, pepper, oil and lemon juice.
Keep in refrigerator for 30 minutes.
Finally, add the minced parsley and mint leaves.
Serve cold.

Cooking Time: 30 Minutes

Servings: 6 Persons

INSALATA DI CARCIOFI
(Artichoke Salad)

Ingredients

4 Artichokes
1 Stalk of Celery
Parmesan Cheese (in flakes)
Juice of two Lemons
Extra Virgin Olive Oil
Salt and Pepper

Cooking Directions:

Clean the artichoke and keep in a bowl of water with the juice of one lemon for about 15 minutes.

Drain well, and then put into a salad bowl with the finely minced celery.

Dress with oil, lemon juice, salt, pepper and Parmesan cheese.

Serve cold.

Cooking Time: 15 Minutes

Servings: 4 Persons

PASTA PE CANNOLA O SCORCIA
(Cannola Shell)

Ingredients

800 Gr. of Hard Corn Flour Meal
150 Gr. of Pork Fat
4 Egg Yokes
2 Egg Whites
75 Gr. of Sugar
½ Glass of White Wine or Moscato
Vanilla Flour

Cooking Directions:

The initial technique is to work into the dough meal, pork fat, aromas, eggs, sugar

and white wine to obtain a stiff, well finished paste.

Form very thin sheets of pastry and cut into 10 cm. squares.

Roll up each square on a cane or metal stem in such a way that the two tips join and weld together at the center of the stem by the pressure of the fingers.

Fry with the whole stem into a pot full of olive oil and withdraw as soon as they take a light bronze color. Slip the envelopes out of the stems and fill with buttermilk curd cream.

Crèma di Ricotta
(Buttermilk Curd Cream)

Pass through the sieve 800 gr. of buttermilk curd. Put into a container

½ liter of milk and dissolve 65 gr. of starch and 335 gr. of sugar.

Put on the fire and when (while stirring) you feel it starts to thicken, add the buttermilk curd and continue stirring.

After 1-2 minutes take it out of the fire and pass the whole, as soon as it becomes lukewarm, through a very fine sieve.

MUSTAZZOLI
(Roasted Almond Cookies)

Ingredients

100 Gr. of Almonds (roasted and chopped)
1 Kg Flour
400 Gr. Sugar
10 Gr. Cinnamon
1 Clove (minced)
1 Spoon Yeast
Butter

Cooking Directions:

Put the flour, almonds, cinnamon and clove into a large bowl with the sugar dissolved in glass of water and the yeast.

Knead to make a smooth and elastic dough.

Add a glass of water, if necessary.

Divide into small pieces and put into a baking pan that has been greased with butter.

Bake for 10-15 minutes.

Serve cold.

Cooking Time: 10-15 Minutes

Servings: 6 Persons