

# *A Mother's Day Menu from* **Lidia's Italian-American Kitchen**

In my family—and my family is a big Italian family—the central event of every holiday is the family meal. There's always a lot of cooking at these affairs and plenty of good food, but, even in the best of circumstances, I always spend too much time in the kitchen.

There is, however, one exception to the holiday rule and that is Mother's Day. We have four generations in my family. On Mother's Day, they all come to visit me at my house and they shower me with kisses, flowers, and lots of help in the kitchen. In fact, it's the tradition to make me a big Mother's Day breakfast, featuring favorite recipes like fried potatoes and eggs, soft polenta, crostatas, and chocolate soup. Once lunchtime comes around, I have to admit that I do get into the kitchen with the children because I love it so much. Food is love, and that's how I show it to my mother and the rest of the family.

So if you want to celebrate Mother's Day with a great Italian breakfast or lunch for your mother, here are some great recipes to enjoy with your family!



## **Lidia Matticchio Bastianich**

Lidia's Mother's Day Breakfast: Fried Potatoes and Eggs, Crostata, Soft Polenta, and Chocolate Soup

### **Fried Potatoes and Eggs**

*Patate Fritte con Uovo*

1 medium Idaho potato  
(about 8 ounces)  
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
½ teaspoon fresh rosemary  
leaves  
4 large eggs  
Salt (preferably sea salt)  
Freshly ground black pepper

**Makes 2 servings**

*This recipe serves two, but it can easily be doubled or cut in half. Potatoes and eggs cooked like this are best when prepared from start to end in the same pan, so the potatoes stay crispy and hot. You might want to do one panful at a time the first time you try this recipe, but once you eat this, I guarantee it will become a favorite and soon you'll get the knack of working two pans at once. Serve for breakfast, or as lunch with a salad.*

Peel the potato and cut it in half crosswise. Stand the halves cut side down and cut into ¼-inch slices, then cut the slices into ¼-inch strips. Divide the oil between two 8-inch nonstick or well-seasoned skillets and heat over medium-high heat. (If you don't have two such pans, cook the potatoes and eggs one serving at a time.) Divide the potatoes between the pans of oil and cook, shaking the pans and turning the potatoes as necessary, until they are golden on all sides, about 6 minutes. Hold the potatoes in place with a slotted spoon or wire skimmer while you pour off all but about 1 or 2 teaspoons of oil from each skillet. Return the skillets to the heat, sprinkle half the rosemary leaves over each, and toss well. Break two eggs into each pan. Season generously with salt and pepper, and mix the potatoes and eggs together with a fork until the egg is cooked to your liking. Serve hot.

## Fruit Jam Tartlet Cookies

### *Crostata*

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour,  
plus more as needed
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick)  
cold unsalted butter, cut  
into 12 pieces, plus more  
for the baking sheet
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1/4 cup ice water, or as  
needed
- 1 1/2 cups chunky apricot,  
cherry, peach, or plum  
preserves

**Makes 36 cookies**

Stir 1 1/2 cups flour, sugar, and baking powder together in a mixing bowl. Drop in the butter and toss to coat with the flour mixture. Using the tips of your fingers, rub the butter into the flour until the pieces of butter resemble small corn flakes. (Work quickly, to keep the butter as firm as possible.) Beat the egg yolk and 1/4 cup ice water in a separate, small bowl until blended. Drizzle over the flour-butter mixture and toss just until you have a rough dough. Don't overmix. If there are some pieces of unmoistened dough, drizzle more ice water, about 1 teaspoon at a time, over the dough, and toss lightly to mix. Turn out onto a work surface and knead lightly a few times, just to gather the dough into a ball. Wrap the dough tightly in plastic wrap, and refrigerate at least 1 hour or 1 day.

Lightly butter a 9 x 13-inch baking sheet. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Cut off and set aside one-third of the dough. Roll out the remaining two-thirds of the dough on a lightly floured surface to a 10 x 14-inch rectangle. (Don't worry if it's not perfectly shaped—you'll have a chance to patch the dough.) Flour the surface lightly, as necessary to keep the dough from sticking. Transfer the dough to the prepared pan, covering the bottom completely and pressing the dough along the sides. Trim any overhanging dough, and use the pieces to patch any holes and gaps. Spoon the preserves in an even layer over the dough. Roll out the remaining dough to a circle about 10 inches in diameter. Cut the dough into 1/2-inch strips. Form a lattice pattern over the preserves with the strips of dough by arranging half of them diagonally, then laying the second half of the dough strips perpendicular to the first. Bake until the dough is golden brown, about 25 minutes. Remove, and cool completely before cutting into squares. Crostata can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 3 days.

## Soft Polenta

### *Polenta Morbida*

- 2 fresh or dried bay leaves
- 1 tablespoon coarse salt,  
or as needed
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin  
olive oil
- 1 1/2 cups "instant" polenta
- 4 tablespoons unsalted  
butter
- 1/2 cup freshly grated  
Parmigiano-Reggiano  
cheese

**Makes 6 servings**

*Traditionally, we made polenta with coarse-grain cornmeal and cooked it for 40 minutes or even longer. Today, there is instant polenta, which cooks up nicely in about 15 minutes from start to end. I'm introducing you to polenta by cooking instant polenta; once you master the instant, you can move on to the traditional coarse polenta and you'll notice the difference in texture.*

*Polenta is unbelievably versatile. I could give you a thousand ways to enjoy it, because that's how many ways we ate it while we were growing up. It is delicious poured into a bowl and served as is, or allowed to chill and sliced, at which point you can grill or fry it for the next day's meal. You can even make a "mosaic" by folding diced cooked vegetables into the soft polenta, packing it into a loaf pan while it is still warm, then allowing it to chill. When you cut the chilled loaf into slices, the vegetables will form a mosaic and make an even prettier presentation when cooked.*



## Soft Polenta (cont.)



Bring a kettle filled with about 4 cups of water to a boil, then lower the heat to very low and keep warm. Bring 4 cups water to a boil in a 3- to 4-quart heavy saucepan. Toss in the bay leaves and 1 tablespoon salt and stir in the olive oil.

Working with a small handful of the cornmeal at a time, let it fall through your fingers into the boiling seasoned water, while stirring constantly with a wooden spoon. (Pay special attention to the corners as you stir; it is there that the polenta will stick and scorch first.) It should take about 5 minutes to add all the cornmeal.

When all the cornmeal is added, the mixture should be smooth and thick and begin to perk like a little volcano. Lower the heat so the polenta continues to perk slowly, and cook, stirring constantly, until it is smooth and shiny, about 5 minutes. If at any point during the cooking the polenta becomes too thick to stir easily, add some of the water from the kettle—about ½ cup—to loosen the consistency a little. It is possible that you will not need to add all the water in the kettle before the cornmeal is tender. The polenta is ready to serve at this point, or you can choose to cook it an extra minute or two, to intensify the flavor.

Remove the pan from the heat, stir in the butter and cheese, and pour into a ceramic serving bowl. Let the polenta stand for up to 10 minutes before serving. The longer the polenta stands, the firmer its texture will be.

## Chocolate Soup

*Zuppa al Cioccolato*

- 5 cups milk
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 4 ounces semisweet chocolate, grated or chopped fine
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter

Ground cinnamon

Brioche or panettone, torn into pieces, or hard buttery cookies

Stir ½ cup of the milk and the flour together in a small bowl until smooth. Bring the remaining 4½ cups milk just to the simmer in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Ladle 1 cup of the simmering milk over the chocolate in a heat-proof bowl, let sit a minute, then whisk to dissolve the chocolate. Stir the chocolate mixture into the simmering milk. Strain the flour mixture into the saucepan, then stir in the sugar, butter, and cinnamon. Return to a simmer and cook, stirring, until thickened and smooth, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and let stand a minute or two. Ladle the soup into warm bowls. Pass the brioche, panettone, or cookies for dunking separately.

**Makes 6 servings**



## Baked Stuffed Shells

*Conchiglie Ripiene al Forno*

1½ pounds fresh ricotta or packaged whole-milk ricotta

One 35-ounce can peeled Italian plum tomatoes (preferably San Marzano)

Salt

1 pound fresh mozzarella cheese

1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

⅓ cup chopped fresh Italian parsley

Freshly ground white pepper

1 large egg

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

6 cloves garlic, crushed

½ teaspoon crushed hot red pepper

10 fresh basil leaves

1 pound jumbo pasta shells

**Makes 6 servings**

(about 5 stuffed shells for each serving)

*A pound of “jumbo” pasta shells contains about thirty-six. This recipe makes enough filling for about thirty shells, so it’s likely you’ll have a few extra shells, which may come in handy; as some shells break in the box or during cooking. Be sure to cook the shells very al dente before filling them, or they will tear when you try to stuff them.*

*Individual servings of stuffed shells make an impressive presentation. If you have enough individual baking dishes, divide the shells and sauce among them, then top with cheese, keeping in mind that you might need a little more cheese to top individual servings than is called for in the recipe.*

Place the ricotta in a cheesecloth-lined sieve and set the sieve over a bowl. Cover the ricotta with plastic wrap and place in the refrigerator for at least 8 hours or up to one day. Discard the liquid in the bowl.

Pass the tomatoes through a food mill fitted with the fine disc. (If you don’t have a food mill, seed the tomatoes and place them in a food processor. Process the tomatoes, using quick on/off pulses, until they are finely ground. Don’t over-process, or you’ll incorporate air into the tomatoes and change their texture and color.) Meanwhile, bring 6 quarts of salted water to a boil in an 8-quart pot over high heat.

Slice half the mozzarella thin and cut the remaining half into ¼-inch cubes. Turn the drained ricotta into a mixing bowl. Mix in the mozzarella cubes, grated cheese, and parsley. Season to taste with salt and white pepper. Beat the egg well and stir it into the ricotta mixture.

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Scatter the garlic over the oil and cook, shaking the pan, until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Lower the tomatoes close to the skillet and carefully pour them into the skillet. Add the crushed red pepper and season lightly with salt. Bring the sauce to a quick boil, then adjust the heat to simmering. Cook until the sauce is lightly thickened, about 30 minutes. Stir the basil into the sauce a few minutes before it is done.

Meanwhile, stir the shells into the boiling water. Return to a boil, stirring frequently. Cook the pasta, semi-covered, stirring occasionally, until softened but still quite firm, about 7 minutes. Fish the shells out of the water with a large skimmer and carefully lower them into a bowl of cold water. Drain them carefully.

Preheat the oven to 425° F. Line the bottom of a 15 x 10-inch baking dish with about ¾ cup of the tomato sauce. Spoon about 2 tablespoons of the ricotta mixture into each shell. The shell should be filled to capacity but not overstuffed. Nestle the shells next to each other in the baking dish as you fill them. Spoon the remaining sauce over the shells, coating each one. Arrange the slices of mozzarella in an even layer over the shells. Bake until the mozzarella is browned and bubbling, about 25 minutes. Remove, and let stand 5 minutes before serving.



## Salad of Dandelion Greens with Almond Vinaigrette and Dried Ricotta

*Insalata di Dente di Leone con Vinaigrette di Mandorle e Ricotta Salata*

- 1 pound tender, young dandelion greens (about 10 loosely packed cups)
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup sliced almonds, toasted
- 2 tablespoons red-wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon honey
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ pound ricotta salata, cut into shards with a vegetable peeler

**Makes 6 servings**

*We found the greens for this salad by foraging in the woods and fields.*

*You can forage farmers' markets for tender young dandelion greens, purslane, wild fennel, and pea shoots to make a tasty salad. Even your refrigerator or kitchen garden might yield some goodies, like chives, tender young Italian parsley, thinly sliced red cabbage, or the yellow leaves from celery hearts. Chicory is also a good substitute for dandelion greens.*

Cut any tough stems from the greens and trim any wilted, yellow, or tough leaves. Wash and dry them according to directions on page 67. The greens can be prepared up to several hours in advance and kept, loosely covered with a clean towel, in the refrigerator.

To make the dressing, combine the olive oil, 2 tablespoons of the toasted almonds, vinegar, and honey in a blender and blend until smooth. Add salt and pepper to taste. Place the greens in a large bowl, season them with salt and pepper, and pour the dressing over them. Toss well and divide the dressed greens among six plates, mounding them in the center of the plate. Sprinkle with the remaining 2 tablespoons of toasted almonds and top with shavings of ricotta salata. Serve immediately.

*The ultimate family food critic:  
Grandma Erminia giving  
her rating*



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# Happy Mother's Day!