

You can see that there is a tradition of good, simple and wholesome food in the Reggio Emilia area given the many restaurants and trattorias serving excellent food whose recipes have been passed on from one generation to the next. The basic ingredients are produces from the land and animals, and this is why it is generally considered “plain food”. Its full flavours come from the need to compensate for the lack of expensive and sophisticated ingredients. Pasta, first and foremost (called fujeda in the local dialect), made with unfermented flour, free-range eggs, a sturdy rolling pin and ...” a pair of hands with the right degree of warmth”. Parmigiano Reggiano cheese is well known and distributed throughout Italy and abroad, and is another local product that is found in the famous culinary manuals of the past, recommended for its particular properties. According to tradition, the round of cheese must be cut using a special small olive-shaped knife that breaks the blocks up into irregular pieces as this increases its qualities, like its course and granular surface. Balsamic vinegar, a precious element that is prominent in the local food at Reggio, enriched the dowries of the young brides from noble families. In the past it was put into bottles for use as medication but its aroma, perfume and sweet yet sour flavour convinced experts that it was a good ingredient for use in the kitchen. It is customary here to combine traditional sightseeing with delicious and fortifying gastronomic stopovers; so here it is possible to find some of the most traditional dishes from the province of Reggio Emilia... that can resist the test of any palate!



Parmigiano Reggiano

cheese well worthy of praise

The king of cheeses was known by the name of “Parmesan” because it was invented in the area of Reggio, close to the town of Bibbiano, the birthplace of Parmigiano Reggiano, and this was under the diocese of Parma until 1830. Its origins go back in time: it was first mentioned in literature during the era of the Flavian emperors. The poet Martial speaks of the cheese that was transported from the Enza Valley to the port of La Spezia to be shipped overseas. According to the writings of other Latin writers, its origins can be dated back to around the period of the Roman colonisation of the cisalpine area. It seems, in fact, that the forefather of Parmigiano Reggiano, which had similar features and came from the same area, was already highly praised by Columella, Varrone and Martial at the start of the Christian era. Its name “Parmigiano Reggiano” is protected by a specific law and is reserved exclusively for the cheese produced in the place of origin. Only selected, top quality milk is used to make it, and comes

from dairies in the local area of production. The ingredients needed are natural and simple: milk from the local area, rennet, the skill and the know-how of the “master cheese maker” that has been passed on over the centuries, and the natural ripening process, essential for the successful outcome of the product. It is the combination of various environmental factors that makes this cheese so particular, and these are only to be found in the small area where it is made (the soil, the air, the water and the fodder given to the cows), combined with the special way it is made, which has not changed over the centuries. Parmigiano Reggiano does not tolerate attempts to adulterate it or the use of other methods than those traditionally employed, otherwise the product is subject to decay. It is a product that is entirely free of preservatives and colourings, with a high nutritional value and it is exceptionally easy to digest. It is unique for exalting the aroma, the flavour and the fragrance of pasta as



well as the main courses or salads. The characteristics and the ingredients of the product are guaranteed by the Consortium for Parmigiano Reggiano Cheese. Parmigiano Reggiano is a **de-mi-fat hard cheese**, which is cooked and ripened slowly; it is made with acid-fermented curds using cows milk from animals whose main fodder is meadow forage. Both the milk from the evening and morning milkings is used; this is allowed to rest and the cream is then partially skimmed off. Calf rennet is used for curdling. The use of anti-fermentative substances is not allowed. It is subsequently salted for 20-30 days and then left to mature naturally, **which takes no less than 12 months**. The mature cheese is eaten or grated and sprinkled on top of other dishes. 16 litres of top-quality milk are needed to make one kilogram of Parmigiano Reggiano together with great cheese-making skill.

Parmigiano Reggiano cheese in literature

In the first half of the fourteenth century, Boccaccio" mentions this cheese in the "*Decameron*" with a hilarious and mouth-watering description when Calandrino, the hero in the story, reaches the town of Bengodi and stops





speechless in front of “a mountain made only of grated parmesan cheese, where there were people who did nothing else but make macaroni and ravioli, and cooked them in capon broth, and then they tossed them down, and whoever grabbed most got most”, and these people shoved the macaroni and the ravioli down to the bottom ready for eating. When Molière was almo-

st fifty years old, he started to dedicate himself to the pleasures of the table without restraint in order to forget the worry of writing. After a while, his stomach started to give him some pain and a friend advised him, almost by chance, to eat a small piece of the cheese called “*Parmesan*” at the end of each meal; it was imported into France and its digestive merits were

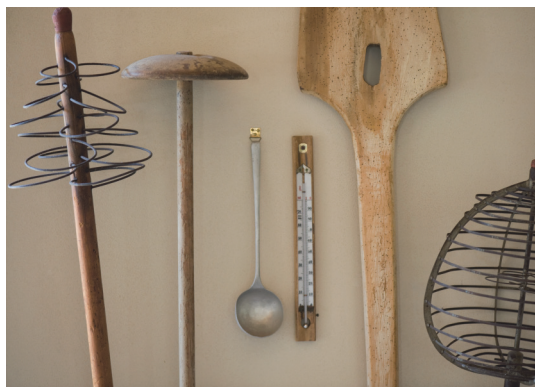


well known. The writer immediately bought some of this famous cheese and the result was wonderful: his stomach trouble was cured and he started to feel much better. Shortly afterwards, the amounts of this miraculous, tasty and digestible cheese that was served increased at his table; in fact, as time passed, Molière ate almost only this.

A few stopovers when sightseeing:

Traditional tools linked with the making of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese can be viewed in the musei della civiltà contadina (farming museums) and at cheese dairies that are located all over the area around Reggio. In particular: the “**Museo della civiltà contadina e artigianale della Val d’Enza**” (via Copellini, 13 - Villa Aiola - Montecchio - phone 0039.0522.871271) has a collection of items and work tools from rural life with particular importance to the production of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. It is also possible to visit two, historical cheese dairies, one dating back to the 18th century that used to use faggot fires and a more recent one that used steam. The “**Museo dell’agricoltura e della civiltà contadina**” (c/o

Rocca Estense, Corso Umberto I, San Martino in Rio, phone 039.0522.636726 - 636720) has a section dedicated to cheese dairies and the art of cheese making. As you go through the flat areas surrounding Reggio, you’ll often notice pretty little buildings that are often octagonal, with bricked-up windows: this is where the milk used to be processed and the Parmigiano Reggiano cheeses were left for seasoning.



the recipe of tasting

RISOTTO ALLA PARMIGIANA

Ingredients for 6 people:

400g. rice, 150g. butter, 100-150g. grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, 1 onion, broth, salt, cream

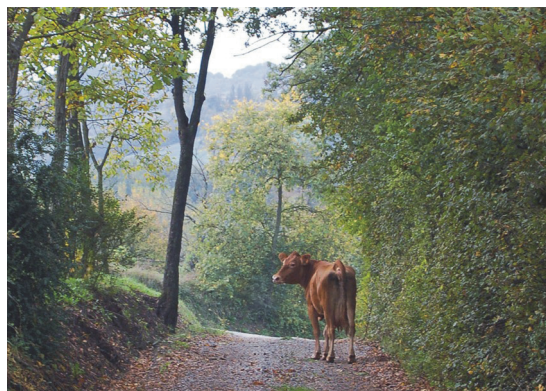
Finely chop the onion and fry in 100 grams of butter until golden. Add the rice and toast it over the heat for a few minutes then add the hot broth a little at a time. Add the cream when the rice is cooked halfway. Before serving, remove from the heat, add the remaining butter and the Parmigiano Reggiano and stir quickly.



Red Cow Parmigiano

The Reggio Emilia Red Cow breed is autochthonous to Northern Italy and was brought to the area by Barbarian tribes during the 6th Century A.D. Red Cow milk was used in the abbeys of the Benedictine monks eight centuries ago to make the first Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. Red Cows are thus fully entitled to proudly call themselves the “Mothers” of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. Reggio Red Cow’s milk has certain qualitative characteristics that distinguish it from the milk used for making conventional Parmigiano Reggiano. Red Cows produce one third less milk than the Holstein breed, but their milk gives a better yield in cheese-making. This is due to the fact that it actually has a higher content of casein, the key protein in the process of transforming milk into cheese, which makes the cheese more suited to a long aging period as well as more digestible. Hence the regulations applicable to Red Cow Parmigiano Reggiano require that the product should only be sold after a minimum aging period of 24 months, resulting in a straw-coloured cheese with a sweet, delicate and enduring flavour, and an intense aroma even after aging for over thirty months.

For guided tours of the cheese-making Facilities, visit the **Parmigiano Reggiano Cheese Consortium** website at:
www.parmigiano-reggiano.it



the recipe of tasting

“FANTASIA” SALAD

Ingredients:

300g. Parmigiano Reggiano,
200g. fresh porcini mushrooms,
2 bunches of radishes, fresh lettuce,
olive oil, lemon juice, a tea-
spoon of French mustard

Wash and slice the mushrooms and radishes. Mix together with the lettuce cut into strips and add flakes of Parmigiano Reggiano. Dress with the oil, lemon juice and mustard.



Traditional Balsamic Vinegar from Reggio Emilia

the King of Sweet and Sour

With its dark brown colour, syrupy appearance, aromatic and not at all acidic flavour, Balsamic Vinegar goes perfectly with vegetables but also with flakes of grana cheese, raw prosciutto, cold fish, red meats, vanilla ice cream, strawberries and... whatever else springs to mind! Balsamic vinegar can be rightly called the “King of Sweet and Sour”: it is generous with any dish and able to discreetly enhance its true flavour. This top quality product, obtained by slowly maturing cooked grape must in special little barrels, is at the centre of a fierce debate between experts from Modena and Reggio, who are still contending its origins. Already known in ancient Roman times, when it was called “*balsamum*”, defined as “pungent” by **Horace** and “tart” by **Pliny il Vecchio**, it was widely used both for dressing vegetables and for preserving “pork thighs”, fried fish and clingstone peaches. Its use as a home medicine is also well documented: Lucio Columella, in fact, who lived in the first century A.D., enumerated its therapeutic properties against indigestion,

ophthalmic diseases, swelling in the legs of animals, the bites of poisonous animals and fainting. It was said that the vinegar from Reggio was also made with “esoteric inspiration” in the famous castle at Canossa and by the country folk in the Enza Valley. This medieval evidence of the vinegar from Reggio was given us by Donizone, the monk who was a biographer and contemporary of **Lady Matilde di Canossa**, in the pages of his “*Vita Mathildis*”. He tells that, in 1046, the future emperor of Germany, Henry III, a wise, cheerful and rich King of magnificent appearance, who had travelled to Italy for his coronation, set aside his pride and sent his rival, Bonifacio, several new things since he wanted “*some of that vinegar that he had heard acclaimed and that was made in the castle at Canossa*”. Donizone continued stating that the Marquis wanted to give a clear example of his magnificence, so he ordered a pure silver barrel, two oxen, a cart and a yoke to be prepared immediately and sent to the King with the oxen. After filling the



barrel with the precious liquid, he sent it to the king, who was a guest of the city of Piacenza and he “*well appreciated that great and magnificent gift*”. The fame of this vinegar, that was only called “balsamico” starting in the 18th century, became unstoppable over the centuries. Consecrated by the great poet, **Ludovico Ariosto**, it appears in every ledger of the riches belonging to the gentry of Reggio, jealously guarded in their lofts like a jewel of the table. In the Age of Enlightenment, we should mention the Book containing la “*Maniera di Cucinare e Vari Segreti e Rimedi per Malattie et Altro*” (the Way to Cook and Various Secrets and Remedies for Sickness and the Like), which has a ample section dedicated to the production of various types of vinegar: one is very strong, another aromatic, another strong, another good against

the plague, mentioned by the four thieves from Marseille. The documented history of balsamic vinegar from Reggio goes back to the Renaissance, the period when the custom of having a set of vinegar barrels at home to mature the cooked must of the local grapes first started among the gentry and was later taken up by the middle class. The nineteenth century marked the fame of this product for good, the victim of robberies, the precious stuff of dowries, a miraculous medicine and the star of provincial and international shows as well as the subject of dissertations and careful study in the attempt to certify its authenticity. In short, its prestige was and is so high that it is easy to understand why many would like to secure themselves the merit of having invented it!

the recipe of tasting

RISOTTO WITH BALSAMIC VINEGAR

Ingredients for 6 people:

Sauté a small onion and 100g. of butter in a small saucepan. Add 500g. of rice and let it rest for a few minutes then cover with hot meat broth. When it starts to boil, add about $\frac{3}{4}$ litre of a full-bodied, aromatic red wine. Cook another 15 minutes, stirring continuously, and add more broth if necessary. Dress with plenty of butter and grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. Just before taking it off the heat, add a small glass of balsamic vinegar.

the recipe of tasting

CUTLETS WITH BALSAMIC VINEGAR

Prepare some veal or pork cutlets, beating them well until they are very thin and then coating them with flour. Melt the butter in a frying pan and then cook the cutlets over high heat. Add one or two spoonfuls of balsamic vinegar and allow it to evaporate. When it has been absorbed, finish cooking with a cup of very hot meat broth. Serve the cutlets with their gravy.

ITS FEATURE

Traditional Balsamic Vinegar from Reggio Emilia is obtained by maturing cooked must from local grapes for a very long period (at least twelve years), in a set of barrels made of different woods and in different sizes, which is decanted every year and topped up regularly. The result of all this patient wisdom is a dark brown, syrupy liquid, with a penetrating perfume and an unmistakable, sweet but sour taste. Three marks are used to indicate first, second and third quality vinegar, which are respectively gold, silver or lobster colour, according to the category assigned by the commission of tasters. Traditional Balsamic Vinegar from Reggio Emilia is sold in characteristic 100cc. bottles that are shaped a little like an upside down tulip, sealed on

the cap with the sealing wax of the Consortium (to guarantee the quality of its contents. Local area of production: foothills).

For further information and guided tours of the Balsamic Vinegar Cellars contact:

Consortium of Producers of Traditional Balsamic Vinegar of Reggio Emilia

www.acetobalsamicotradizionale.it



the Reggiano Pig

natural qualities and acquired virtues

Nimèl, porch, purscel, or scorzoun: there are many names that mean pork in the local dialect of Reggio Emilia. Although we know pigs existed in the province of Reggio Emilia since ancient Neolithic times, as this is well documented, the creation of the “*arzana*” (Reggiano) breed, which is less wild and hirsute, is much more recent. It was in fact only in 1873 that experiments were attempted to cross the traditional pig from Emilia with the British Yorkshire breed, a pale docile and sedentary animal. This led to the Reggiano pig: as robust, firm and full of flavour as its ancestors but easier to reproduce and fatten up, thanks to the traits from the English race. Reggio has the merit of having restored the glory of this animal, as it was despised by the ancient Egyptians and the Jews who blamed it for causing epidemics of leprosy and identified it with the devil in the Gospels. Farmers knew the value of pigs and were therefore very fond of them. In fact, in addition to providing the usual salamis, there is a use for every part of a pig. Another

great merit of the pig was that of providing “*sugna*”, a fatty mass used to make salves to reduce the suffering of those afflicted with shingles (called St. Anthony’s Fire in Italian). The medicinal properties of *sugna* are possibly the reason for an image that has its origins in the country: that of St. Anthony Abbot, the protector of those who caught this disease, with the pig that had the cure for healing the ill. After so many curses, this small gratification really seems well deserved!

Pliny the Old believed that pork had up to fifty different flavours... the variety of salamis in the Po Valley is certainly surprising: raw Prosciutto Crudo, cooked Prosciutto Cotto, Mortadella, Coppa, Salame, Cotechino and Zampone are just some of the local cold meats and sausages from Reggio Emilia, where the usual and tastiest way to accompany them is with a plate of Gnocco fritto, a savoury pastry made of flour and water which is skilfully rolled out and that puffs up when it is fried in boiling hot lard. Gnocco fritto is readily available in restaurants in the



Apennine hills above Reggio Emilia but it also often features on the menus in some of the typical trattorias in the areas near the Po River.

PROSCIUTTO CRUDO

This is possibly the best-known cured meat product, the first that was awarded the title of a local product both in Italy and other European countries. In Italy, this “local product” title has now been taken up by the consortiums that protect these products: one of the most important of these is definitely the one located at Parma. Prosciutto crudo, and that protected by the Parma Consortium in particular, has a globular shape with no trotter attached and weighs around 9 Kg. **It has an exquisite taste**, as well as being excellent from a nutritional point of view and is matchless in its genuineness.

PROSCIUTTO COTTO

Prosciutto cotto is the cured meat that is eaten most thanks to its organoleptic features and ease of assimilation. Current dietary recommendations recognise that prosciutto cotto is **a food that is very light and is easily digested**.

COPPA

Coppa is a complete product made with the majority of the meat from the neck. It is an interesting product from a technological point of view, as it combines some aspects similar to prosciutto cotto (salting) and some aspects similar to salamis which are subject to a long aging process (maturing stage). This phase is a long process, which gives coppa its particular aroma. **Coppa can be considered a complete food** as regards its contribution of fats and protein in our diet and can be the main dish in a well-ba-

lanced meal, as its average contents are well-balanced by accompanying it with a plate of vegetables.

MORTADELLA

Mortadella is a cooked cold cut that was initially created as a use for the second and third cuts of pork. Current production prefers the domestic types of meat. Mortadella is made in a variety of different sizes, by finely mincing pork and/or beef in varying percentages. The demand for products **made entirely of pork** is gradually growing; these also contain a slight amount of milk by-products.

SALAME

The name salami comes from the Latin “*salumen*” and means “*a combination of savoury things*”. It represents one of the oldest ways of preserving meat. Offcuts of meat, shoulder, mince, belly and the fat from the neck or solid fat, fatty and lean parts, are used to make it; these are blended together in varying proportions but can still be distinguished one from the other. A salami’s aroma and flavour develop thanks to the complex balance of the spices and the enzymatic reactions of the fats and protein. From a nutritional point of view, it is excellent for those who want a diet that **is full of energy**, tasty and full of flavour and it can be eaten as the main course instead of as an antipasto in this case.

COTECHINO

This is a sausage that is made using various **lean cuts** of pork alone with the addition of the fat and the rind. It is then processed together until a homogenous mixture is obtained. Natural

skins are used as a casing for the sausage, and these are first cleaned, eliminated of fat and stored in salt for a long period. The cotechino must be boiled and is usually served with a plate of mashed potato or beans.

CICCIOLI

A well-known fact about pork is that absolutely nothing goes to waste and even the less selected parts can be transformed into real delicacies. This is the case with ciccioli, or grassei in the local vernacular, made from off-cuts cooked with spices and herbs. The mix is then made into small slivers that are left to dry. They have a strong, spicy flavour and are served as a starter.

the recipe of taste

TAGLIATELLE PASTA WITH HAM AND PEAS

Ingredients for 6 people:

500g. egg pasta tagliatelle, 150g. raw prosciutto crudo, 50g. butter, 200g. fresh peas, 150g. freshly-grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, 1 onion, chopped tomatoes, meat broth, salt and pepper

Sauté the finely chopped onion in the butter, add the ham chopped into cubes and allow to cook for a few minutes. Add the peas, the chopped tomatoes, a little meat broth and simmer for at least 30 minutes with the lid off; add salt and pepper to taste. Cook the tagliatelle in plenty of salted water, dress with the sauce and the freshly-grated Parmigiano Reggiano.



Handfuls of Pasta

flavours to enjoy

I CAPPELLETTI

The people from Reggio are very proud of this variety of pasta, eaten as a first course, whose main feature is the filling that is different from that found in the rest of the province and region. Their traditional recipe even varies slightly from family to family and from area to area (whether in the hills, Po Valley or the town), as does their size that tends to increase as you go towards the River Po. Cappelletti are **appetising and absolutely irresistible**, and are perfect when served in meat broth, but they also go well with a meat or cream sauce. There is a bit of mischief said about their shape which makes them particularly appealing, especially for men. A legend, whose origins are found in the verses of the “*Secchia Rapita*” (the Stolen Bucket) by Alessandro Tassoni, says that Venus, Mars and Bacchus stopped to rest in a trattoria during their travels on Earth. The following morning the gods of Wine and War got up very early to admire the dawn whilst sleepyhead Venus stayed in bed. When she got up, she was

surprised to find herself all alone and maybe also a little hungry, so she called for the cook. When he saw her beautiful body, he was rather taken aback and shut himself in his kitchen, determined to reproduce a small detail of the goddess at least. In his enthusiasm, he kneaded some pastry dough, cut out lots of little squares, stuffed them with meat and closed them by wrapping them around his little finger. His passion had now faded but “*by imitating the navel of Venus, he learnt the art of making tortellini*”. Those who don’t believe in these myths may prefer the story that their name comes from “cappello” which means hat, as the shape of cappelletti looks like the hats worn in the Middle Ages as well as the mitres worn by grenadiers.

the recipe of taste

CAPPELLETTI/Caplet

Ingredients for 4 people:

For the filling: 2 small onions, 150g. butter, a beef chop or ano-

the recipe of taste

ther cut of beef provided it is full of flavour, 70g. mixed ham, 60g. pork fillet, 90g. veal or turkey or chicken, livers and giblets, 1 clove of garlic if liked, nutmeg, fresh breadcrumbs.

Melt the butter in a pan and add the onion, salt and pepper. Cut the meat into small pieces and add to the butter. Cook gently with the lid on. When the meat is very tender, but not dry, finely chop the contents of the pan together. Add an egg, the fresh breadcrumbs

and three handfuls of freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. The latter is an essential ingredient therefore it must be highly flavoured with a full aroma. Remember: sauté the breadcrumbs with a pinch of nutmeg first in the liquid given off by the meat. The filling varies sometimes with the addition of sausage or minced mortadella. Or by replacing the butter with beef marrow and adding cloves. Roll out the pastry as for pumpkin tortelli and close the cappelletti, which should be served in meat broth (broth worthy of cappelletti!).



the recipe of taste

TORTELLI DI ZUCCA_Pumpkin ravioli

Ingredients for 6-8 people:

500g. plain flour, 4 eggs, lukewarm water, 500g. pumpkin, 200g. mostarda di mele mantovana (pickled apples from Mantua), 100g. amaretti biscuits, grated nutmeg, grated rind of half a lemon, fresh bread-

crumbs, 1 medium onion, 100g. bacon fat, 50g. butter, 1 glass of dry white wine, half a tablespoon of tomato puree, salt and pepper.

- For the filling: mash the cooked pumpkin (if it was boiled to cook it,

allow to drain in a colander for two hours first) and add the finely chopped pickled apples with a little of their juice, the finely crushed amaretti biscuits, the grated lemon peel, a pinch of nutmeg, salt and pepper and just enough breadcrumbs to bind the mixture. Allow to rest for a couple of hours - For the pastry: mix the flour together with the eggs, a pinch of salt and a little water. Knead well until the dough is smooth, elastic and firm; wrap in a tea towel and allow to rest for about 30 minutes.

After the pastry has rested, knead it again and then use a rolling pin to roll it out thinly. Cut into rectangles which should be about 10 cm long, place a little of the pumpkin filling on each one and close by folding the pastry over, to make a square shape, and taking care to press the edges down well to seal them. Prepare the soffritto sauce with bacon fat and butter, chopped onion, white wine, tomato puree, salt and pepper. The sauce should be allowed to thicken over the heat for at least an hour, adding a little water, if necessary. As an alternative to the bacon fat and tomato soffritto sauce, you can serve these tortelli with plain melted butter and freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. Cook the tortelli in plenty of salted, boiling water, drain them as soon as they are cooked and serve with butter and plenty of freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese.

the recipe of taste

GNOCCHI DI PATATE_Potato dumplings

Ingredients:

1kg. white potatoes, 200g. type "00" white flour, salt to taste

Wash the potatoes and boil them in their skins in a pot with plenty of lightly salted water. Boil for about 30 min. Drain and peel while still hot. Put them through a potato-masher, add the salt and flour and mix until you have a pliable ball of dough that is easy to work with. Take a piece of dough at a time and roll it out by hand until you have snake-like shapes, then cut these into pieces about 2 cm long. Press and roll each piece on the special gnocchi-making tool or alternatively over the prongs of a fork. Prepare a pot of salted water and bring to the boil: drop the "gnocchi" into the water and drain as soon as they rise to the surface. Serve with pasta sauce or with melted butter and grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese.

GNOCCHI DI PATATE

"Gnocchi" are made with potatoes and served as first course and are a typical dish from Reggio Emilia. There is a very characteristic festival connected to this particular kind of pasta which is held at Guastalla, close to the River Po, during Lent and during which all the participants wear period costume. The festival was first held in the town square in 1869, on occasion of the March Bacchanalia. The so-called "gnoccata" revolves around the elusive King of the

Gnocchi, a jester monarch, who symbolises power that can be laughed at. The festival is still based on the distribution of cooked gnocchi in the beautiful square dating back to the time when the Gonzaga Family was in power.

GNOCCO FRITTO

Deep-Fried Dough Squares

This is a traditional delicacy from Emilia known under different names depending on the province. In Reggio it is called *gnocco fritto*, *gnocc fett* or *al gnoc frètt*, and *'l gnoc*.

the recipe of taste

GNOCCO FRITTO/Gnocc frètt

Ingredients:

500g. flour, 1 sachet instant brewer's yeast, 2 knobs of lard,

25g. water, salt to taste, oil or lard for deep-fryingredienti:

Mix all the ingredients together and leave the dough to rest in a freezer bag for 15 minutes. Roll out the dough with a rolling pin to a thickness of about 3 mm. and cut some squares, size 10x10 cm. Fry immediately in very hot oil or lard, drain on kitchen paper and serve with a selection of sliced cold cuts.



CHIZZE

Chizze are a delicious savoury snack eaten for breakfast in city cafés, and can also be bought in local bakeries. They are made to a very old recipe of Hebrew origins.



ERBAZZONE

Erbazzone reggiano, in the local dialect *scarpazzoùn*, is made with simple ingredients, that any country housewife would have once had to hand, and is basically a pastry shell containing a vegetable filling. It appears that the recipe goes back to medieval times. Erbazzone is a local product that is historically only to be found in the area of Reggio Emilia Province, whose recipe has resisted the test of time. It is a savoury flan made of pastry stuffed with a very tasty filling: spinach, onion, garlic, breadcrumbs and plenty of grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. Little cubes of bacon fat and lard are scattered on top of the pastry shell.

the recipe of taste

ERBAZZONE/Scarpazzoùn

Ingredients:

- for the filling: 1.5Kg. of spinach or Swiss chard, 1 bunch of spring

the recipe of taste

onions with a bright green stem, a handful of parsley, 60g. of prosciutto or bacon fat, 4 tablespoons of olive oil, 50g. of butter, 2 cloves of garlic, 4 or 5 handfuls of freshly grated, strong parmesan cheese, salt and pepper to taste.

- for the pastry: 200g. plain flour, 1 teaspoon of lard, 2 tablespoons of olive oil, salt and pepper to taste, lukewarm water.

- for pastry with ricotta (cottage) cheese: 220g. flour, 50g. ricotta (cottage) cheese, 1 teaspoon of lard, 2 tablespoons of olive oil, lukewarm water, salt and pepper to taste.

Melt the prosciutto lard and add the crushed garlic cloves and the chopped spring onions, including their stems. Add the oil and butter and allow the onions to cook but not burn. Add the boiled and squeezed spinach. Add salt and pepper to taste and allow to cool. Remove the

garlic; add the finely chopped parsley and the Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. Prepare the pastry, allow it to rest for half an hour then divide into two parts. Roll out one of the halves using a rolling pin, place in the greased baking tin and pour over the filling. Roll out the other half of pastry, which should be thinner than the first half you used for the bottom. Sprinkle the pastry with flour and roll it over the rolling pin, which should also have been sprinkled with flour. Fold the two ends of the pastry towards the middle of the rolling pin and slip the rippled pastry over the filling. Prick with a fork and bake in the oven at 200°. Leave for about 30 minutes; a few minutes before it is ready, grease the top with a piece of bacon fat. Put it back in the oven and remove after a few minutes. Your erbazzone is now ready to eat.





Local Dessert

delights for the taste

SPONGATA REGGIANA DI BRESCELLO

This cake was invented at Brescello, close to the Po River, and recently an application was made for protected origin status. It is now available in good pastry shops all over the province. It is a flat round cake that has a soft but substantial filling that has a strong, spicy taste.

The legend

December 10, 1480, a terrible winter according to the chronicles of the time. Serafina Bonino, Mother Superior of the Benedictine convent, had gone well over her budget for her Christmas presents for the benefactors of the Convent. She had been working on the recipe for a cake, an old "*spongata*", which she thought would have brought a little Christmas cheer for the nuns and the benefactors. The Mother Superior got the ideal of making these cakes when the apothecary of Brescello spoke to her of a recipe that had met great success with the Sforza fa-

mily, the noblemen of Milan, over twenty years before. It was a caked called "*Spongata di Berselo*", that had been sent to **Duke Francesco Sforza** as a token of loyalty. The production of the Mother Superior's spongata cakes was successful and the convent started to be inundated with demands for the cake from then on. This **traditional Christmas cake** has an illustrious history: it is said that it is the cake that Petronius mentions in his "*Satiricon*", the ingredients are certainly the same. Much later, Tassoni spoke of this cake in the pages of his "*Secchia Rapita*" where he describes the attempted reconciliation between the people of Bologna and Modena. After the Legate of Bologna had been to Modena to negotiate the peace treaty, he returned with their gift of fifty prestigious Brescello spongata cakes. At Brescello, spongata cakes continued to be made over the centuries and after the nuns and the convent were no longer there, the recipe remained in the custody of the fa-

milies from Brescello. A type of spongata cake was also made at Reggio Emilia, and must have been considered a luxury as its sale was forbidden in times of shortage. In 1830, Don Palazzi started to make spongata cakes again on a small scale, passing the tradition on. In 1845, the recipe was passed on to Luigi Benelli who then founded his well-known spongata cake factory that is still famous today in fact. There are those who say that you have the impression of seeing furtive figures moving about in the shadows in the laboratory where the cakes are still made according to the traditional recipe, and you can hear a slight but hurried shuffling sound, like the patter of light footsteps: maybe the nuns gave the final touch, so that we can enjoy the delights of this delicious sweet from ancient times.

SPONGATA CAKE

The skill in making spongata cakes is in its filling: first of all, you have to use walnuts from the hills in Emilia that must be used when they are freshly picked. The walnut shells are opened and the nut is removed: about 10,000

kgs of nuts are needed for production of spongata cakes at Christmas. Each ingredient must be skilfully combined and precise timing must be followed in the process. The chopped nuts are laid out on large tables, honey is poured over and then you start kneading. Later, almonds and raisins are added and are kneaded in again. At this stage, the mixture is already quite stiff and pine nuts are now added: these are the most delicate ingredients and they must not be crushed. The mixture should be made using wooden utensils and your hands. Lastly, a blend of thirteen different spices is sprinkled over the mixture, and these give the spongata cake its typical flavour and character.

SAVOIARDI Savoyard Biscuits

In 1919, after the war, Elico Alai recalled that he had been an apprentice at a baker's as a lad and he had learnt some of the tricks of the trade. He had a bicycle for transport and the imagination to try out new things, so he put together the simplest of ingredients that he could get: water, flour and sugar. He tried and tried again, trying to remember exactly what his grand-



father had said when he spoke of “*bracciatella all’acqua*” biscuits. Elico’s sweets started to be successful but he continued to look for a formula in order to invent something new. People in Reggio liked to eat cold desserts and puddings and used Sponge Cake to make them, but this tended to dissolve when the other ingredients were added. Elico therefore wanted to invent his own product to replace this sponge cake and soon started losing sleep due to his constant invention of new mixtures and recipes. When he was thirty-five, he managed to create a **light and exquisitely tasting biscuit** that was crumbly, in a twisted shape and was very sweet and full of beaten eggs. However, “Uncle Elico”, as he was known to all, was looking for something exclusive: he tried hundreds of versions, working the ingredients in various proportions until, one night, he created a biscuit that was so light that it would fly up in the air like a feather if you blew underneath it. It was also so soft that it could be used instead of any sponge cake. He called it “*Savoyard*” because it reminded him of a kind of biscuit he used to eat when he was a child in Piedmont. At last, Uncle Elico could sleep at night. His Savoyard biscuits were very successful: since it was a leavened biscuit, it was perfect for making any kind of dessert, including the well-loved “*Zuppa inglese*”, a favourite one at Reggio Emilia. Many bakers tried to copy his Savoyard biscuit over the years but nobody was ever successful: his recipe remained a well-guarded secret. Elico only revealed the recipe to his niece and she continued in his steps running the biscuit factory with the same philosophy

of her uncle, so... if you want to try a real Savoyard biscuit, you’ll have to come to Reggio Emilia to get them! The egg white is beaten until it is stiff and the sugar is added to the yolk. Then just enough milk and flour are added to bind the mixture. Finally, it is put through the biscuit machine with its cloth bag that presses out the mixture in an oval shape. Savoyard biscuits are then baked at about 200 degrees and the speed of the conveyor belt, as they pass through the oven, depends on the weather on that particular day: it all depends on the wind or the humidity of the air. When Uncle Elico was still alive, he was in charge of “sniffing” the weather before switching the oven on, and he used to open and close the air vents, increasing the wood that was burning. Now Elico looks down from a frame on the wall, checking that everything be done just as he would have liked!

CIAMBELLA _Italian Breakfast Cake

It is a very simple and typical dessert made at home, shaped like a large doughnut. Its main ingredients are flour, water and eggs, the same ingredients used to make bread. This explains its popularity and widespread consumption at home at any time of year. It is usually eaten by dipping it into one of the local, sweet sparkling wines (Lambrusco or Bianco di Scandiano). **In the past it was the usual sweet eaten on Sundays**, also thanks to its ability to keep well. The dough was baked after being brushed with beaten egg and sprinkled with sugar. Once, certain bakers, used to bake “*Brazadel da acqua*” during the cold season. These were humble sweets

and were only found around Reggio Emilia. They were made with a dough made of white flour and water and were left to brown in the oven. They were as wide as your palm and used to cost five cents each. They were very light and crunchy even if their pale and crushed appearance certainly wasn't very appealing. The peddlers used to display these biscuits in a basket with a curved handle that was useful for transporting them, and they would skewer a few of them on a stick that was fixed at right angles to one end of the handle. These local sweets completely disappeared at the turn of the 20th century together with the peddlers who used to sell them. Originally, *brazadel da acqua* were not considered a delicacy and were eaten for breakfast when fasting during Lent as they were made with an ounce of flour, about twenty-seven grams, which was the amount allowed by the "Holy rules". Nowadays, "*brasadela*" is still made at home in Reggio Emilia using the humble ingredients that are available in any home. These biscuits, which were originally the old *brasadelle*, are also sold at bakeries in the town and countryside.

the recipe of taste

CIAMBELLA/Brasadela, Busilan

Ingredients:

300g. flour, 3 eggs, 120g. butter, 250g. sugar, 1 grated lemon zest, 1 pinch of salt, 1 sachet baking powder, pearl sugar

Pour the flour on a board, make a well in the middle and add all the other ingredients: 2 whole eggs plus an extra yolk (keep the egg white to one side), sugar, baking powder, grated lemon zest, a pinch of salt and the previously softened butter. Mix together until you have a soft, but not sticky, dough. Lay it out on a baking tray previously lined with baking paper, moulding it into the traditional S-shape. Brush the top with the remaining egg white and sprinkle with the pearl sugar. Bake in a pre-heated oven at 180° for around 30-40 minutes until golden brown.





ZABAGLIONE

This is an energy-giving and nutritious food which was invented by chance at Scandiano. **The name Zabaglione comes from the French “buillon”,** a term inherited from the French during military occupation. In 1560, the exhausted troops under the command of some “Giovanni da Buglione” set up camp at Scandiano. One evening he commanded the soldiers to look for something to eat in the surrounding countryside. However, times were really hard and there wasn't much to take from the poor folk so the soldiers were only able to get hold of eggs, flour and white wine. The captain had all the ingredients mixed together in a large pan and cooked them over the fire: the result was a warm, thick broth that the soldiers loved and which rid them of their tiredness. That evening was the first time “*John's Broth*” had

been made and the soldiers repeated their forays the following evenings, telling the farmers of Scandiano that the ingredients were needed to make “*buillon de Jean*”. The name soon altered to become “*Janbujon*” and finally became “*Zabaglione*”, the Italian version of the old invention from Scandiano. **Nowadays, zabaglione is made with Marsala wine** because sweet white wine, used in the original recipe dating back to the sixteenth century, is now processed to become sparkling wine (whereas it had to be drunk quickly in those days because it turned into vinegar otherwise). Marsala is poured slowly and added to the egg yolk, then stirred slowly. Some people like to serve it with a chopped-up biscuit or amaretto biscuit because there was a piece of dry bread at the bottom of the bujon.

TORTA DI RISO_Rice Cake

This is a very nutritious sweet cake, **which finds great favour and is very widespread in homes around Reggio Emilia**, and has also the advantage of only needing a short cooking time. It became known in the Reggio Emilia area thanks to the “mondine”: at the start of the 20th century, the youngest daughters of country families were

sent to work at the rice plantations in the Vercelli area to bring in the harvest. Rice was an important part of the salary of a mondina as well as the money they earned, and this led to the widespread use of rice in traditional food in Reggio.

the recipe of taste

TORTA DI RISO_Rice Cake

Ingredients:

750g. whole milk, 150g. rice, 150g. sugar, 1 sachet of saffron, 1 sachet of vanillin, 3 eggs, 1 grated lemon zest, 1 glass of water with Sassolino liqueur, bitter almond and aniseed liqueur, breadcrumbs to line the baking tin

Heat the milk in a saucepan; when it comes to the boil add the rice, the vanillin, the grated lemon zest and 2 spoonfuls of sugar. Simmer for about

10 minutes. Remove the saucepan from the heat then add $\frac{1}{2}$ a glass of the liqueur and the remaining sugar. Allow to cool. Then add the egg yolks, the saffron melted in $\frac{1}{2}$ a glass of the liqueur and the egg whites whisked to stiff peaks. Mix well and pour in a baking pan previously greased with butter and coated with the breadcrumbs to form a lining. Bake in the oven for about 30 minutes at 180° centigrade. Once out of the oven, allow to cool before removing from the baking tin.



SUGHI D'UVA e SAVOURET

Grapes Juices and Savouret

These “juices”, in the local dialet *sug d'ova* o *sug*, actually resemble a thick jam. They were created by farmers during the grape harvest and are now eaten as an elegant dessert. Flour is added so that the “juices” are particularly nutritious. Modern techniques

resulting pulp is pressed and squeezed in a little press. The juice is poured into a cauldron and boiled, pieces of apple and pears, usually left whole, are thrown in as it is cooking. It is boiled for several hours. Savouret is used as a jam, for making puddings or as a syrup that is dissolved in water for a delicious and refreshing drink.



used to preserve the grape must enable production throughout the year but the real thing is only found during the months of September and October. The must of a particular kind of grape is needed to make them, called “*l'Anceletta del Reggiano*”. In homes in the country, it was the custom to make certain delicacies on the day when the grapes were pressed with the grape must, the thick, sugary layer that is left at the bottom of the tub after the impurities have been taken out and the wine has been tapped off. The decoction is mixed together with flour and boiled until it becomes thick and rubbery. The skill of the housewife, or “*rasdore*”, is also seen in the preparation of another decoction called “*savouret*”, a mixture that is similar to a pickle. Apples and pears are chopped and squeezed of their juice using a rudimental grater (called a “*radein*”), the

The surrounding areas of Reggio Emilia offer two gourmand trails. The trail to the south of Via Emilia takes the visitor around the hills and high plateaus of the valleys of the Enza and Secchia rivers, amid historic and natural attractions: this is the **Strada dei Vini e dei Sapori delle Colline di Scandiano e di Canossa** (Route of Wines and Flavours of the Hills of Scandiano and Canossa). The trail leading towards the Po River on the other hand, making its way through the countryside around the small Renaissance courts of the plain, is the **Strada dei Vini e dei Sapori delle Corti Reggiane** (Route of Wines and Flavours of the Courts of Reggio Emilia).

www.stradaviniesapori.re.it

www.stradavinicortireggiane.it



Our Wines

sparkling like their land

LAMBRUSCO

The Romans were aware of the wine-growing potential of the land in the area around Reggio Emilia and appreciated the talents of the Lambrusco vine, clinging onto the elms. The bunches of grapes that this vine produces turn into a pale red, sparkling wine, which has always been served with the traditional pasta dishes and main courses of the area. Lambrusco is nowadays a product that bears significant weight in the local economy. The area where Lambrusco is still produced covers the whole province and includes a wide area of the Po Valley and the foothills. A Presidential Decree in 1971 awarded Lambrusco controlled-origin status (D.O.C.), indicating a family of vines with a common matrix that have always been grown in Emilia, in particular in the provinces of Reggio Emilia and Modena, partly in Parma, and going over the 'border' into the Mantua area. The main trait of this wine is that of being sparkling, it was tra-

ditionally subject to spontaneous re-fermentation in the bottle in the spring. Lambrusco Reggiano comes from the grapes of Lambrusco Salamino, Marani and Ancellotta vines. It is generally made as a red or rosé wine even if the latest regulations stipulate that it is also possible to make a white sparkling wine from lambrusco grapes. The overall, minimum natural alcohol content is between 10-15 degrees; it has a dry or sweet taste, without a great deal of body but is harmonious, fresh and pleasant. The wine is also sold by the litre in demijohns at the wine cooperatives of the region. Lambrusco should be drunk when it is still young (within the spring following the harvest) and is perfect when served with lasagne, meat sauces, boiled meats, zampone, cotechino, salamis and... cappelletti in meat broth. It should be served cool (16°) and only uncorked when it is to be drunk, leaning the bottle slightly forwards.



BIANCO DI SCANDIANO

Another local delicate and fresh wine is called Bianco di Scandiano, whose name has been on the list of controlled-origin wines since 1976. It can have a sweet and or semidry taste, and is made in semi-sparkling and sparkling versions. Bianco di Scandiano is served with cold dishes, starters, fish and desserts. It is grown in the foothills above Reggio Emilia and is available in two versions: dry and sweet. The dry sparkling wine is made from Trebbiano-Sauvignon grapes; it has a pleasant, slightly aromatic smell, with a persistent sparkle and an aromatic, fresh, dry taste, with the right amount of body. Its overall alcohol content is about 11,80°. It is good with fish, but it can also be served with pasta and main courses. It is excellent as a cocktail and to accompany desserts. It should be served cool. The sweet sparkling wine has a pleasant, aromatic and delicate smell with a fine and persistent sparkle and a sweet, fresh, round and well-balanced taste. Its overall alcohol content is 12°. It should be served with desserts and pastries.

For further information and guided tours contact:

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