LENA & MICHELE'S ITALIAN RECIPE BOOK

TO FALL IN LOVE ONE BITE AT A TIME

ERIKA VANZIN

A special gift for our readers who preordered
The Road to You

A TASTE OF ITALY FROM LENA & MICHELE

The Road to You is a story filled with summer skies, stolen glances… and a whole lot of food. As Lena and Michele travel across Italy, they fall in love one bite at a time over warm maritozzi, sizzling eggplant, and pasta that tastes like home.

This recipe book is my small token of appreciation for preordering the novel and believing in the story before it even hit the shelves. I wanted to share a few simple, delicious Italian dishes that capture the spirit of Lena and Michele's journey, so you can get a taste of their adventure before you read a single page.

Whether you're cooking for one or sharing with someone special, I hope these recipes bring a little bit of Italy into your kitchen and get you even more excited for the story to come.

Buon appetito,

Erika

1

PASTA ALLA NORMA

Sicilian Eggplant Pasta

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Serves: 4 | Prep: 15 min | Cook: 30–40 min

🛒 Ingredients

- 12 oz pasta (rigatoni or spaghetti)
- 1 large eggplant, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 3 tbsp olive oil (plus more for frying)
- 3 garlic cloves, smashed or chopped
- 1 (28 oz) can whole peeled tomatoes
- 1 tsp sugar (optional)
- Salt and pepper
- Fresh basil leaves
- ½ cup ricotta salata (or substitute with feta or parmesan)

🍳 Instructions

1. Salt the eggplant cubes and let them rest for 30 minutes. Rinse and dry.
2. Fry eggplant in olive oil until golden and soft. Drain on paper towels.
3. Heat 3 tbsp olive oil, add garlic, and cook for 1–2 min. Add tomatoes, simmer for 20 min.
4. Boil pasta in salted water. Reserve ½ cup water, drain pasta.

5. Add fried eggplant to sauce. Toss in pasta and reserved water if needed.
6. Stir in basil and serve with grated cheese.

🔄 *Substitution: Use **feta** or **grated parmesan** if ricotta salata is unavailable*

💡 **Tips for Beginners:**

• Don't skip salting the eggplant. It's key for flavor and texture.

• Use a good-quality canned tomato like San Marzano for best results.

• If you don't like frying, you can roast the eggplant cubes in the oven at 425°F (220°C) for 20–25 minutes with olive oil.

📝 ***Note: "Every time I fry eggplant, I hear my nonna whispering 'Bravissimo'." – Michele***

2

SPAGHETTI AL POMODORO

Classic Tomato-Basil Pasta

Serves: 4 | Cook Time: 30 min

🛒 Ingredients

- 12 oz spaghetti
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, smashed
- 1 (28 oz) can crushed or whole tomatoes
- Salt and pepper
- 5–6 fresh basil leaves
- Optional: grated Parmesan

🍳 Instructions

1. Heat olive oil, sauté garlic for 1–2 minutes.
2. Add tomatoes, simmer for 20–25 minutes.
3. Season with salt, pepper, and add basil.
4. Cook spaghetti in salted water. Reserve ½ cup pasta water, drain, and toss with sauce. Add pasta water if needed.

5. Toss pasta with sauce, add water if needed.
6. Serve with grated Parmesan if desired.

💡 ***Tip: No fresh basil? Use 1 tsp dried basil added earlier in the sauce.***

3

GNOCCO FRITTO WITH PROSCIUTTO AND RICOTTA

Fried Bread with Creamy Cheese

Serves: 4–6 | Prep: 15 min + rising | Fry: 15 min

🛒 Ingredients

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp instant yeast
- ½ tsp salt
- ¾ cup warm water
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Vegetable oil for frying
- Prosciutto slices
- Soft cheese: squacquerone (in the original recipe) or ricotta, whipped cream cheese, or whipped feta

🍳 Instructions

1. Mix flour, salt, and yeast. Add water and oil. Knead to form dough.
2. Let rise for 1 hour.

3. Roll out to ⅛ inch and cut into rectangles.
4. Fry in hot oil until puffed and golden. Drain.
5. Serve with prosciutto and soft cheese.

💡 ***Tip: Substitute squacquerone with whipped ricotta or cream cheese.***

4

TORTELLI DI ERBETTE (SHORTCUT VERSION)

Ricotta & Spinach Pasta with Wonton Wrappers

Serves: 4 | Prep: 30 min | Cook: 10 min

🛒 Ingredients

- 8 oz ricotta
- 5 oz cooked spinach (drained and chopped)
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan
- Pinch of nutmeg
- Salt and pepper
- 1 egg
- 1 pack of wonton wrappers
- Butter and sage or light tomato sauce (for serving)

🍳 Instructions

1. Mix ricotta, spinach, Parmesan, nutmeg, egg, salt, and pepper.
2. Place 1 tsp filling in the center of each wonton wrapper. Moisten edges and fold to seal.

3. Boil in salted water for 3–4 minutes.
4. Serve with butter and sage or tomato sauce.

💡 ***Tip: No wonton wrappers? Use lasagna sheets and seal with egg wash.***

5

MARITOZZI CON LA PANNA

Roman Sweet Buns with Whipped Cream

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Serves: 6–8 | Prep: 20 min + rising | Bake: 20 min

🛒 Ingredients

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tsp active dry yeast
- ⅓ cup warm milk
- 2 tbsp softened butter
- 1 egg
- Zest of 1 orange
- Pinch of salt
- ¾ cup heavy whipping cream
- 2 tbsp powdered sugar

🍳 Instructions

1. Dissolve yeast in warm milk with 1 tsp sugar. Let it foam.
2. Mix flour, sugar, zest, and salt. Add egg, butter, and yeast mixture.
3. Knead and let the dough rise for 1.5–2 hours, until it has doubled in size.
4. Shape into 6–8 ovals. Let rise again 30–45 minutes.

5. Bake at 350°F for 15–20 minutes. Cool completely.
6. Whip cream with powdered sugar until stiff.
7. Slice rolls, fill with cream, and dust with powdered sugar.

📝 ***Note: "I wasn't prepared for how good these were." – Lena***