

# Food & Wine

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## A Glorious Christmas

A Family Feast in Aspen 50 Great Gifts to Savor  
An Insider's Italian Holiday Spectacular Roasts



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## recipes

1. Christmas Spaghetti with Walnuts 2. Fried Christmas Cod  
3. Christmas Eve Fish and Escarole Pie 4. Minestra Maritata 5. Baked Pasta with Ragù and Ricotta



### pizza (for breakfast?)

I don't think there's a better place than Naples to eat pizza. After all, it was invented here (no one quite remembers when) and here too it reached its 19th-century apotheosis when a smart pizza-maker added a layer of New World tomatoes to a basic focaccia. But pizza for breakfast? Yes, indeed, I was told by Luigi Condurro, who runs **L'Antica Pizzeria da Michele** (1-3 Via Cesare Sersale; 011-39-81-553-9204; closed Sundays) with his brothers. Da Michele, ABOVE, may not be the city's oldest pizzeria (half a dozen claim that honor), but it's my candidate for most authentic. The Condurros make only two kinds of pizza—the utterly simple marinara, with tomato sauce, and the margherita, with a slightly more elaborate mozzarella, basil and tomato topping—and either one makes a perfect breakfast.

**Trionfo** (46 Via Colletta; 011-39-81-553-9426), diagonally across the street from da Michele, offers a more varied pizza menu. The Christmas specialty is *pizza a salsicce e friarielli*, topped with sausages and bittersweet *friarielli* greens.

**Da Ettore** (56 Via Santa Lucia; 011-39-81-764-0498; closed Sundays) is so busy you should make a reservation to try their specialty, *pagnottello*, a stuffed pizza that's at its finest filled with eggplant parmigiana.

### Christmas Spaghetti with Walnuts

4-6 SERVINGS

Weeks before Christmas, harbingers of the feast begin to appear in Neapolitan food shops with the arrival of the annual harvest of walnuts from the Sorrento peninsula—incomparably fresh, plump, flavorful nuts that are renowned throughout Italy. Despite its rich flavors, *u spaggett' anatalina*, a meatless pasta for Christmas Eve, is poor-folk food, a dish for those too poor to have more than a few anchovies in the festive sauce. The importance of using extremely fresh nuts in this dish cannot be overstressed.

- 1 cup walnuts
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 6 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 4 whole salted anchovies (see Note) or 10 oil-packed anchovy fillets, coarsely chopped
- 1 pound spaghetti

#### Sea salt

- ½ cup minced flat-leaf parsley

1. Preheat the oven to 400°. Spread the walnuts in a pie pan and toast in the oven for 4 minutes, or until fragrant. Transfer the nuts to a kitchen towel and rub together to flake away as much of the skin as possible. Coarsely chop the nuts.

2. In a large saucepan, warm the olive oil. Add the garlic and cook over moderately low heat, stirring occasionally, until softened. Add the anchovies and cook, stirring and pressing them into the oil with the back of a fork until almost dissolved. Stir in the walnuts and keep warm.

3. Cook the spaghetti in a large pot of boiling salted water until almost al dente; add ½ cup of the pasta cooking water to the walnut sauce and bring to a simmer. Drain the spaghetti and add it to the walnut sauce. Turn and stir the pasta to coat it with the sauce as it finishes cooking, 1½ to 2 minutes. Season with salt. Transfer the pasta to a warmed bowl, garnish with the parsley and serve at once.

**NOTE** To prepare salted anchovies, rinse them under running water. Strip the fillets away from the bones; discard the bones

and tails. Don't worry about getting every tiny bone out of the fillets—most will dissolve in the sauce anyway.

**WINE** Garlic, anchovies and walnuts need a fragrant regional white to bridge their flavors. Try a 1995 Fiano di Avellino from Mastroberardino or Feudi di San Gregorio.

### Fried Christmas Cod

10-12 SERVINGS

Not many people observe the four-week Advent fast these days, but no true Neapolitan would dream of eating anything but fish on Christmas Eve. "How many fish dishes?" I kept asking, remembering that Italian-Americans always insist on an odd number of seafood preparations for the repast. I was repeatedly greeted by a blank stare: either Neapolitans never did this or the custom faded long, long ago.

Salt cod, however, is *de rigueur*. Throughout Italy, salt cod (*baccalà*) is bought presoaked and ready to cook from grocers and fishmongers. In this country, you'll have to soak the 3 pounds of boneless salt cod yourself for at least 2 days, changing the water 4 times daily, before it is plumped and ready to fry; look for boneless salt cod at fish shops in Italian, Greek and Portuguese neighborhoods. Be sure to soak it until it is tender and then dry it thoroughly before frying.

This recipe is equally delicious made with fresh fish. Buy thick fillets of cod, haddock or a similar white fish. You can simply flour the fish before frying it, but the crisp and crunchy batter below is really worth the slight effort involved.

On Christmas Eve in Naples, fried fish is served with nothing but lemon wedges, but at other times of the year, Neapolitan cooks accompany the fish with a couple of tablespoons of the piquant tomato sauce that follows this recipe.

- ¼ cups plus 3 tablespoons warm water
- ½ teaspoon active dry yeast
- 1½ cups unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more for dredging