



Cooking With the Sicilian Contessa

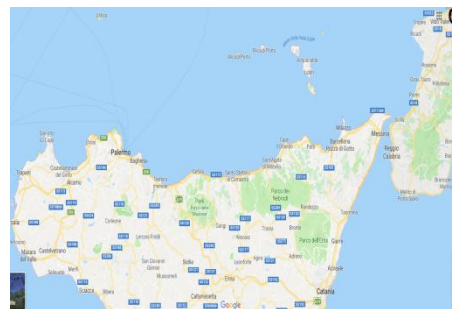
By Marie Militello Davies

Back in 2000, I agreed to train a small group of friends to run the 2001 Chicago Marathon. I was new to this group—everyone else already knew each other and had nicknames for each other. I did not. But my dear friend, Rudy, decided I needed one and after querying me during a run one day, it came out how my godparents referred to me as The Sicilian Contessa, as I lived in “the first castle on the right”. Rudy latched onto that, and my nickname became, “The Sicilian Contessa”. I then relayed how I was actually descended from royalty and told her the story below . . .

For a brief point in history, the Spadafora's occupied one of the small islands off the coast of Sicily near Messina. The island had belonged to one of the five country houses involved in the feud of San Martino and from that scuffle was acquired by the victorious Count Federico Spadafora in 1459. He declared its independence from Sicily and it became its own country. For nearly 300 years, the Spadaforas ruled this tiny little island in the Tyrrhenian Sea.

A very interesting monument of note still intact is the Baronial Palace. It was built in the 1500's in order to defend the island from incursions coming in from the sea and also from the Church in Rome.

The noble family retained possession of its island (Vulcano) until 1737, when the noble, Guttierrez Spadafora, a descendent to Federico, ceded the island back to Sicily. He moved the clan back to the mainland, naming the village he founded in his own name, "Spadafora".



When my maternal great grandparents immigrated to the United States in 1901, as often happened at Ellis Island, European names didn't always get translated or spelled properly and the family name became "Spatafora". My grandfather, a teenager then, became "Giuseppe Spatafora", later marrying Gracia Rebello, parents to seven children, including my mother, Virginia Spatafora.



Among the many traditions in a Sicilian household is cooking—it's more than just filling our bellies, it's how we show love. It's a social thing, having meals together. It's one of the reasons I serve a "family style" breakfast.

I'm often asked for recipes, which I am happy to share. There are five which I am consistently asked for, so here's what you'll find inside:

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The Best Coffee Cake EVER!

When I first decided to quit my career as a chemist and start my career as an innkeeper, after the birth of my first baby in 1988, a sales rep for my former company gave me this recipe. She said it was the best coffee cake I'd ever taste. Judging from the number of people who have asked for this recipe, I'd say she was right! So, thank you to Marie Meyer, of Zumbota, MN, for sharing this with me and my guests.



The Cake:

Mix together:

- 1 1/2 c. flour
- 3/4 c. sugar
- 1 T baking powder

Cut 1/4 c. (1/2 stick) of butter into dry ingredients (I use a wire whisk if you don't have a pastry cutter) until evenly mixed. (this is easiest if you grate it as if it were cheese). Set aside.

The Filling:

In another bowl, mix together:



2 T flour
 2 T cinnamon
 1/2 c. brown sugar

Add the following, stirring until evenly mixed:

2 T melted butter

Set aside.

In a large glass measuring cup, thoroughly mix the following:

1 c. milk
 1 egg, beaten
 1 t. vanilla

For the glaze (optional, but really good!), stir together until smooth and thin enough to drizzle:

1/2 c. powdered sugar
 1-2 T milk
 1/8 t. almond or vanilla extract (I always use almond)

Add wet ingredients to dry ingredients; stir until moistened. Pour half the batter into a greased and floured loaf pan OR an 8" square pan. Top with half the cinnamon mixture. Pour in the remaining batter and top with the remaining cinnamon mixture.

Bake 30 minutes (square pan) to 40 minutes (loaf pan) at 350°F or until done. (I see a time difference between my gas oven and electric oven). Top should be golden brown and firm to the touch. Do not over bake.

Just before serving, enough to drizzle. If glazing while the cake is still hot, mix it thicker. the sides. If the glaze is too runny, simply add a bit more powdered sugar until it's the desired consistency. Serve and enjoy!

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If You're French It's Quiche, If You're Italian It's Frittata

For many years, I would do an individual crust less quiche in ramekins, which were very well received. So much so, guests would ask for seconds. But it took 45 minutes to make another! So, one Sunday, I made a really large quiche so guests could have seconds. And I left out the crust, to accommodate guests following a gluten free diet. It has become a Sunday regular menu item and a huge hit with guests. One guest said recently, "I never eat eggs but this was so good, I had two helpings." Many have asked for the "recipe".



In a glass baking dish, sprayed with cooking spray, I layer three cheeses:

A sharp cheese: sharp cheddar, white cheddar, smoked Gouda

A mild cheese: Swiss, Provolone, Mozzarella, Muenster, cream cheese, Creamy Havarti

A sharp cheese: Pepper Jack, Jalapeño Havarti, Feta, Dill Havarti

I most often use sharp cheddar, Swiss and PepperJack.

Finely chop:



1 small onion and/or several green onion stalks
 1/2 red bell pepper, 1/2 yellow bell pepper
 1 c. chopped mushrooms, broccoli, black olives, spinach or a combination of these.

Mix together in a 2 c. glass measuring cup:
 Eggs Number of people plus two)
 Equal amount of half & half or whipping cream

Pour egg/cream mixture over cheeses, onion and pepper. Sprinkle seasoned salt evenly over egg mixture. Repeat with black or white pepper. Garnish with thinly sliced bell pepper, thinly sliced tomatoes or asparagus spears. Bake at 350°F for one hour or until golden brown and set in the middle. Let the frittata sit for 10-15 minutes before cutting.

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Yogurt Filled Melon, with Strawberries, a.k.a. Boat Melon

When I had my first baby, the hospital sent me home with all kinds of goodies in a nice diaper bag. Inside was a recipe book on eating healthy, produced by Dole. I had never liked yogurt but when I saw the picture, it looked so refreshing! When I opened my first bed and breakfast about a year later, I dug that out to make for guests. It was an immediate hit! When my kids were older, they dubbed this fruit recipe "Boat Melon".

1 Honeydew melon (or cantaloupe)
 2 t. unflavoured gelatine
 1/4 c. Boiling water
 4 oz fruit flavoured yogurt



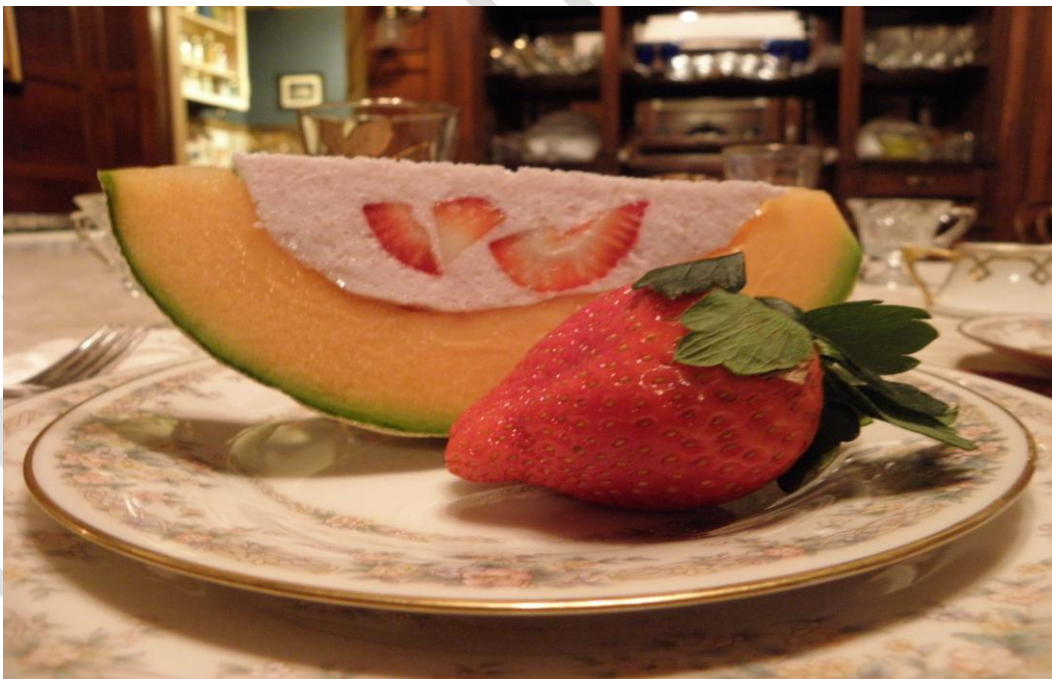
3-4 strawberries, sliced or quartered

8 large strawberries for garnish

Cut your melon in half and gut the seeds. I place the halves on ramekins to keep level. To your ¼ c. Boiling water, very quickly whisk in the gelatine until foamy. Immediately add the yogurt and whisk in until foamy. Pour into the melon halves. Immediately drop in the strawberries, evenly placed. Set in the fridge overnight until set.

In the morning, slice with very sure strokes and with a very sharp knife. Garnish each wedge with a whole strawberry.

NOTE: I prefer to use a cantaloupe, blueberry yogurt and strawberries for the contrast. No other fruit works as well as strawberries.





Pound Cake—A Family Recipe



My mother-in-law is what I call a "functional cook". She had four sons to feed and a modest budget, so she was adept at cooking filling, "OK" meals. Her idea of dessert was Ambrosia ice cream and some fruit. I was stunned one visit to learn she had made the delicious, moist pound cake we enjoyed that evening. It was her mother's recipe handed down from her grandmother. It's hard to believe something so delicious could be so simple to make—but it takes 90 minutes to bake!

3 sticks butter, softened

8 oz cream cheese, room temp



3 c. Sugar

6 eggs

1 tsp almond extract (original recipe is 2 t. vanilla extract)

3 c. Flour (plain, not cake)

Cream together butter, cream cheese and sugar until fluffy. Add eggs one at a time (this is to incorporate air to make your cake light and fluffy—don't rush this). Add in the flour and extract. Batter will be thick.

Pour batter into a bundt pan or two loaf pans. Bake at 300°F for 90 minutes or until slightly golden and firm to the touch.

Enjoy!

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Granola—Really Good Granola





We host a lot of Europeans, for whom muesli, or granola, is quite popular. Store-bought granola is very expensive for what it is, so I searched online and found the recipe below. It's popular with vegans, Europeans, my oldest daughter and I have been known to eat some with very dark chocolate milk for my afternoon snack. ☺

3 c. Rolled oats

1 c. Slivered almonds (or sliced); or any chopped nuts—especially hazelnuts

$\frac{3}{4}$ c. Shredded coconut

$\frac{1}{4}$ c., plus 2T packed brown sugar

$\frac{1}{4}$ c., plus 2T maple syrup

$\frac{1}{4}$ c. vegetable oil

$\frac{1}{4}$ c. dried fruit—I use cranberries, raisens, apricots (chopped), dates (chopped), etc.

Preheat oven to 250°F.

In a large bowl combine oats, coconut, brown sugar and nuts.

In a separate bowl, combine oil, maple syrup and salt. Add to oats mixture.

Pour mixture onto two sheet pans and bake for 75 minutes, stirring half way through.

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I hope you enjoy trying out these recipes. The full version of ***The Sicilian Contessa Cooks*** will be out later this spring. Keep an eye on your inbox for the debut! I also hope I've inspired you to come enjoy these dishes first hand when visit Saint Louis.



I'm looking forward to welcoming you to *your home away from home*, here in Saint Louis. And know that if you have any questions, I'd love to hear from you.



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