

## Corfiot Gastronomy



Being a Mediterranean island, Corfu traditionally produced considerable quantities of olive oil, wheat and wine from its agriculture, and these, alongside fish and wild greens, were the standard foodstuffs, for the population in Byzantine times. The majority of people would only eat meat during religious festivals and on special occasions (such as at weddings).

Imported foodstuffs increased the variety of ingredients available during the four centuries of Venetian rule: cellars and kitchens had by then available potatoes, maize (corn), tomatoes, beans and peppers, as well as luxury items including coffee and chocolate.

Many of the Corfiot dishes are available at local restaurants, so that visitors may easily taste them and meet the gastronomic culture of Corfu.

Corfiots adopted quite a few Venetian culinary habits, copying recipes still used today in unchanged form. Some of the more typical dishes include **Bianco** (fish with potatoes in a garlic and black pepper sauce), **Bourdetto** (fish in tomato sauce with liberal quantities of mild red pepper and cayenne pepper), and **Sofrito** (filleted veal, first lightly fried, then casseroled in wine, vinegar, garlic and parsley), while **Pasticcio dolce** was an elaborate dish dating back to ancient Rome. Such recipes, which both took a long time and required considerable effort to prepare, were usually to be found at the dinner tables of the nobility and the wealthy middle class only, those who had access to the various spices Venetian trade provided, as well as to meats and game.

The poorer classes in town and the farming families in villages had to use their imagination along with the limited foodstuffs they could produce or gather. Their main dish would be salted cod or dried fish, using a variety of cooking techniques and condiments according to the season, alongside there were wild greens – and bread, which, dipped in olive oil, could well account for breakfast, lunch and dinner too.

Corfu later saw the operation of three pasta factories. In this way the most emblematic Corfiot dish was born, the *Pastisada*, a whole cock or pieces of veal in tomato sauce with red pepper, wine, vinegar, olive oil, and a large variety of spices, served with spaghetti.

## **Bianco recipe**

- ☞ 2 tablespoons butter, unsalted
- ☞ 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- ☞ 2 medium onions, halved and thinly sliced
- ☞ 8 -10 garlic cloves, chopped
- ☞ ½ cup dry white wine
- ☞ 6 potatoes, scrubbed, peeled and sliced (I prefer Yukon gold)
- ☞ 2 lbs fish fillets, fresh (white, firm fleshed fish like cod)
- ☞ 1 lemon, halved
- ☞ 3 tablespoons fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped

salt & freshly ground black pepper

### **Direction**

- Heat the butter and one tablespoon of oil in a large stew pot or Dutch oven (large enough for you to spread fish out in a single layer--it's okay if they are crowded a bit).
- Add onions and garlic and cook over medium-low heat, stirring, until softened (about 5 minutes).
- Turn heat to medium high, add wine and bring to a boil, scraping up any bits from the bottom of the pan.
- Reduce heat to medium low and add potatoes, salt and pepper and cook for about 8 to ten minutes.
- Lay the fish fillets over the potatoes, drizzle with the remaining oil, and add just enough water to cover the fish.
- Season with salt and pepper, partially cover, and simmer until fish is flaky, potatoes are soft and the liquid largely reduced (depending upon thickness of fish, anywhere from ten to twenty minutes).
- Adjust seasoning, squeeze lemon over the fish and garnish with chopped parsley and lemon wedges.



## **Pastisada recipe**

- 3 lbs boneless veal shoulder, in one piece, rolled and tied (or beef)
- 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 1 cinnamon stick (about 3 inches long)
- 5 allspice berries
- 3 whole cloves
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 cup dry red wine or 1 cup white wine
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 2 large onions, finely chopped
- 2 (1 1/2 lb) cans whole tomatoes, drained
- 3/4 teaspoon sugar
- 1 pinch cayenne
- 1 lb ziti pasta or 1 lb penne
- 1/2 cup butter
- 2 ounces grated parmesan cheese
- 2 ounces grated pecorino romano cheese

## **Direction**

- Heat oven to 300 degrees F.
- Rub veal with 1 tsp salt and 1/2 tsp pepper.
- Make shallow incisions all over meat and insert thin slices of garlic, using about 1/2 half.
- Heat 3 tbsps olive oil over medium-high heat until rippling; add meat and sear on all sides.
- Add remaining garlic, cinnamon, cloves, bay leaf.
- Reduce heat to very low.
- Cook, covered, 10 minutes, shaking casserole 2 or 3 times to prevent sticking.
- Add wine and vinegar, increase heat to high.
- Heat to boiling, then remove from heat.
- Cover casserole tightly with foil; place lid securely over foil.
- Bake 30 minutes.
- Carefully remove lid and foil; turn meat with wooden spoons so as not to pierce; replace foil and lid; bake 30 minutes longer.
- Heat remaining 3 tbsps oil in large skillet over medium-high heat until rippling.
- Stir in onion; reduce heat to medium.
- Saute until onion is softened but not browned, about 5 minutes.
- Stir in tomatoes, 1/2 tsp salt, sugar, 1/8 tsp pepper and cayenne.
- Reduce heat to low.

- Cook, uncovered, stirring frequently, 20 minutes.
- Remove casserole from oven and increase oven temperature to 375F.
- Pour sauce over meat; replace foil and lid.
- Bake 3-4 hours, or until beef is fork-tender.
- Remove casserole from oven.
- Transfer meat to heatproof platter, cover with foil to keep warm.
- Remove and discard bay leaf, cinnamon, allspice and cloves from sauce.
- Let sauce stand a few minutes; degrease.
- Use a small amount of the fat removed from the sauce to grease a wide, shallow, 4- quart baking dish.
- Cook pasta until al dente.
- While pasta cooks, put butter into a small saucepan and melt over medium-low heat.
- Let butter brown.
- This is known as beurre noisette.
- It should be very fragrant.
- Add browned butter to pasta along with half of grated cheese.
- Toss to coat.
- Add 2 cups of tomato sauce and toss again; turn into baking dish.
- Until veal roll and cut into ½ inch slices.
- Arrange in overlapping row over pasta.
- Pour remaining sauce over all.
- Bake, covered with foil, 10 minutes.
- Uncover, bake 10 minutes longer.
- Sprinkle with remaining cheese and serve.



## **Sofrito recipe**

- 1 kg (35 oz./2 pounds) boneless veal (top round), cut in 6 slices
- 150g all purpose flour, for dredging (5 oz.)
- 1 tbsp butter
- 1/3 of a cup olive oil, for frying
- 7-9 cloves of garlic, sliced
- 1/3 of a cup white wine vinegar
- 1/3 of a cup white wine
- 1 and 2/3 cups beef broth (warm)
- 1/2 a cup freshly chopped parsley
- salt and freshly ground pepper

### **Direction**

1. To prepare this delicious Greek sofrito recipe, start by preparing the veal. Season the meat with salt and freshly ground pepper and dredge lightly the veal slices with flour, tapping off any excess. Heat the oil and butter in a large non stick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the veal (in batches) and sauté, until browned on all sides. Do not add all the meat in the sauce pan, rather sauté in batches, so that the temperature of the oil remains high and the meat is sealed. When done, remove with a slotted spoon, place on a platter, cover and set aside.
2. Cut the garlic cloves in slices and add in the same oil used to brown the meat. Turn down to medium heat and stir for a minute. Pour in the white wine vinegar and deglaze. Add the veal and the white wine and wait for a couple of minutes to steam up. Add the warm broth and season with salt and pepper.
3. Turn the heat down to low-medium and simmer until the veal is tender and the sauce thickens, for about 30-40 minutes. About 5 minutes before removing from the heat, stir in the freshly chopped parsley.
4. Serve the Sofrito while still hot over mashed potatoes, rice or fries, with some crusted garlic bread aside. Enjoy!



