

Chapter 8: Healthy Italian Recipes to Try at Home

Troppe salse vivande false—Too much sauce means false food.

It's time to start cooking and eating like an Italian. If you have no idea where to start, don't worry. We'll face this together! Even if you're not a MasterChef, these easy Italian recipes will have your kitchen filled with delicious aromas in no time! All you have to do is choose a recipe, read it through, get the ingredients, and follow the steps. These recipes are all fairly easy for the purpose of getting you up and running the Italian way without spending endless hours cooking. Of course, use your own imagination and creativity with the recipes. If you want to add an additional ingredient, go for it! Feel free to customize the recipes to cater to your specific needs. If you find a recipe that you like, why not invite the family over for a lunch party this weekend? Let's do life the Italian way without holding back! Happy cooking!

Tuscan Herb Soup

Italians love making soup, and in wintertime, you won't find an Italian home without a pot of some soup on the stove. One of the most popular soup recipes in Italy is one that comes from Tuscany. Bean and herb soup is quite popular all over Italy, and every region and family adds their own twist to it. This specific recipe focuses on the herbs of Tuscany and delicious Italian cheese. This soup is often called Ribollita, and it consists mostly of different green vegetables, beans, cured meat, and pasta. Originally, this soup was made with the beans herbs and vegetables that grew naturally in Tuscany. This soup is fresh and filled with hearty goodness.

Time

40 minutes

Serving size

4 servings

Notes

You will use both the stems and leaves of the parsley but separate them during the preparation since they'll be used during different phases.

Ingredients

2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil

kosher salt and black pepper grounds

3 large, minced garlic cloves

1 ½ teaspoons of fennel seeds

2 quarts of chicken broth

¾ cup orzo pasta

4 ounces of diced pancetta (use bacon if you can't find pancetta)

1 bunch of parsley

4 ounces of chopped tuscan kale

½ cup of dry white wine of your choice

8 ounces of white beans (fresh or canned)
8 ounces of kidney beans (fresh or canned)
2 ounces of hard cheese like Romano (grated)

Directions

Start by prepping the ingredients. You can grate the cheese and set it to the side, as well as separate the parsley stems from the leaves. Cut the kale into rough pieces.

In a pot, heat your olive oil and cook your pancetta. Let it cook for about 6 minutes, and then add the parsley stems, the fennel seeds, your wine of choice, and some ground black pepper.

On medium heat, let the mixture simmer for about 3 minutes. This will allow most of the liquid to evaporate.

Add the chicken broth to the mixture and let it boil. Once it begins to boil, lower the heat, and add the orzo. Allow it to simmer for about 10 minutes.

After 10 minutes, add the garlic, parsley, the red and white beans, and some of the cheese. Let it simmer for another 10 minutes.

Remove the soup from the heat before adding the tarragon and arugula. Add some salt and pepper to your liking.

Add a little bit of cheese on top and serve warm.

This soup also makes for great leftovers! So, if it's a family favorite like I expect it to be, make a large pot and keep some for the next day as well.

Tuscan Tomato Salad

Usually, when people read the word “salad,” they skip over the page to the next recipes. Well, I highly suggest you stick around for this salad! It is filled with Tuscan goodness which holds the key to longevity. Italian salads are different in each household throughout Tuscany with everyone adding their own flavor to it, so don't be afraid to explore with some added ingredients yourself. This salad is filled with tomatoes, onions, and healthy herbs. Enjoy!

Time

40 minutes

Serving size

6–8 portions, depending on how hungry you are

Notes

You can use whatever tomatoes you like best! Try to find tomatoes that are currently in season, and be careful not to use unripe, green tomatoes. They are best used when you want to pickle tomatoes. I recommend using cherry tomatoes since they are nice and sweet.

Ingredients

sea salt and pepper for seasoning

1 clove of garlic, finely chopped

1 small onion chopped

¼ cup of extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons of organic balsamic vinegar
½ teaspoon of orange zest, freshly grated, and juice from the orange
1 loaf ciabatta bread toasted, sliced, and cubed
2 ½ pounds of fresh tomatoes, cut into wedges
sprigs of basil leaves and fresh parsley

Directions

Start by prepping the ingredients. Chop the parsley and preserve whole leaves of the basil. Cut the tomatoes into smaller pieces and zest your orange, then squeeze the orange to get some juice. Place your onion in a small bowl of ice water and let it stand for at least 10 minutes.

Whisk together your orange juice, zest, and balsamic vinegar. Add the olive oil and some salt and pepper.

In a different bowl, add your tomatoes, onions, and olives. Add the vinaigrette that you made in step 2. Allow the salad to stand for at least 15 minutes or longer. It can stand up to 2 hours and still be fresh, so if you want to make it in advance, you are more than welcome!

Just before serving, add the parsley, basil, and some more salt and pepper. Remove the salad from the mixing bowl and add it to a serving plate. Drain the juices into a pitcher and use as a salad dressing.

Toast your ciabatta and rub it with olive oil and garlic. Sprinkle your salad with salt, pepper.

Serve the tomato salad with the bread and some additional salad dressing.

You can eat this as a main course or serve it as a side dish to another meal. Feel free to add other ingredients like cucumber and green bell peppers.

Insalata di tonno e fagioli

In simple English, it's a tuna salad. But who wants to call it a tuna salad if you can call it insalata di tonno e fagioli? Regardless of the fancy name, this salad is super easy to make and so delicious! Of course, it's even better when you use fresh ingredients, but if you can't find any, it also works with canned beans and tuna. This dish is usually served as an antipasto right before a bigger meal, so if you're making it as your main meal, add some more ingredients to prepare a bigger salad.

Time

30 minutes

Serving size

Serves 4 people as an antipasto

Notes

If you're using canned tuna, look for tuna in olive oil and not the ones in brine. This will enhance the taste and make it healthier. Prep your cannellini beans a couple of hours before you want to serve the salad.

Ingredients

1 red onion, sliced thinly
1 tablespoon of extra virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

2 tuna steaks or canned tuna

14 oz cannellini beans

1 handful of parsley

Directions

You can prep your cannellini beans the night before since they need some time to soak. Place your beans in a container and cover them with clean water. Let them soak for a couple of hours or overnight. Then, bring the beans to a boil on high heat. Remove the beans from the heat and scoop off the foam on top. Bring to a boil again and allow it to boil for 10 minutes. Let it drain and cool down before adding the beans to the salad.

Chop your parsley roughly and prep your other ingredients accordingly.

Salt your onion and cover it in cold water. Leave it for about 10 minutes, then remove it from the water.

Add the olive oil to a pan and fry your tuna steaks with some salt and pepper.

Mix the onion, parsley, and beans. Flake your tuna and add it to the salad mixture. Season with more salt, pepper, and olive oil.

You can also serve this salad with a vinaigrette sauce or with balsamic vinegar.

Walnut Pesto Pasta

This meal, quite literally, tastes like something you'll find in a fancy restaurant in Italy. However, it's so easy to make! You can choose whether you want to serve this pesto with a side salad as a main dish, or whether you want to serve it as an antipasto. I recommend using spaghetti pasta, but there are many shapes to choose from.

Time

20 minutes

Serving size

Serves 6 people

Notes

This recipe pairs beautifully with some red wine, so go full Italian and pour yourself a glass.

Ingredients

2 tablespoons of sea salt

½ cup extra virgin olive oil

6 quarts of water

2 large garlic cloves that you've minced

1 cup cherry tomatoes

1 cup grated Parmesan

2 cups of chopped basil

1 tablespoon of chopped parsley

1 pound of pasta

¾ cup of walnuts

Directions

Start by prepping your walnuts and placing them in a food processor for a couple of seconds. Stop as soon as the walnuts form a coarse, crumbly texture.

Cook your pasta until it is al dente.

In a large pan, add the walnuts, garlic, parsley, and olive oil. Cook it on low heat for 5 minutes or until the mixture turns golden brown. Don't use high heat since that will cause your walnuts to burn.

Add your cherry tomatoes, diced spinach, and zoodles to the pan. Cook until everything is golden brown. If the sauce is too thick, add ½ cup of water.

Serve with parmesan on top and some extra fresh parsley, along with a garnish of a few walnuts on each plate.

Enjoy the meal and remember the glass of wine! This recipe is a favorite, and it's easy, delicious, and perfect to share with family and friends.

Italian Minestrone

I can honestly say that this is one of my favorite meals of all time! Nothing warms the heart quite like an Italian minestrone. This dish is incredibly satisfying and packed with vegetables, noodles, and delicious flavors. It's perfect for any occasion, and you can choose how simple or elaborate you want to make it. Minestrone is ideal when you have a few random ingredients at home and aren't sure what to do with them. You can either prepare this meal in a regular pot on the stove or use a slow cooker and let it cook on its own.

Time

40 minutes

Serving size

Serves 8 to 10 people

Notes

You can easily make this recipe gluten-free by using gluten-free noodles.

If you have other vegetables in the pantry that are not listed in this recipe, feel free to add them to the mix! This was traditionally made from all the leftovers, so don't be scared to experiment with different kinds of vegetables.

Ingredients

7 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil

1 onion, chopped into smaller pieces

2 garlic cloves, minced

2 celery stalks, chopped into smaller pieces

28 ounces of crushed tomatoes

■ cup of chickpeas

1 cup of beans of choice

2 carrots, chopped (peeling optional)

3 potatoes, diced (peeling optional)

2 cups chopped fennel

½ cup Italian parsley leaves

1 cup pasta of choice

fresh basil leaves

salt and pepper

Directions

Start by prepping all the ingredients and cutting all the vegetables into smaller pieces.

Add the olive oil, onions, and garlic into a pan and cook until brown. Add the carrots and the celery and cook for 5 minutes.

Add the crushed tomatoes, potatoes, herbs, beans, chickpeas, and other vegetables to the mixture. Let it simmer for 20 minutes. When the potatoes are soft, you can remove the pot from the heat.

Add the dried pasta to your mixture, add back to the heat, and cook for 10 minutes.

Season the minestrone with salt and pepper and add the fresh basil leaves on top right before serving.

Dig in and enjoy!

This recipe is sure to be a family favorite, so be sure that you make enough that there are also leftovers.

Eggplant Parmesan

This eggplant parmesan is an incredibly comforting dish, and it's so easy to make. It's also healthy and low in calories, so you don't have to feel guilty when indulging in this delicious meal. Even if you're not an eggplant fan, this recipe will make you change your mind! I've seen little kids who hate veggies ask for seconds, and even teenagers eat with a smile. Enjoy!

Time

60–70 minutes

Serving size

Serves 6 people

Notes

The tomato sauce is an essential part of this recipe, so be sure to use a quality sauce. I recommend adding some basil and garlic to the tomato sauce to enhance the flavor some more. If you want something with a little bit of bite, you can also add some chili flakes or red pepper.

Ingredients

extra virgin olive oil for cooking and drizzling

1 cup of shredded mozzarella

1 cup of parmesan

2 garlic cloves

24 ounces of tomato sauce

pepper and salt

2 eggplants, cut into slices

1 cup of breadcrumbs

2 eggs (3 if they are on the smaller side)

basil and rosemary for seasoning

2 tablespoons of water

Directions

Start by preparing the ingredients. You can grate the cheese in advance, as well as dice and slice all the needed veggies.

Preheat your oven to 400■ and coat a baking dish with some olive oil.

Mix your water and eggs together. Then, in a separate bowl, mix your breadcrumbs, parmesan, and seasoning together.

Dip your eggplant slices into the egg mixture, then coat it with the breadcrumb and cheese mixture.

Place the eggplants on a baking tray and add some more olive oil. Bake the eggplants for 30 minutes, flipping them over halfway through. Season with salt and pepper when they come out of the oven.

While the eggplant is baking, you can mix your tomato sauce, garlic, basil, and crushed pepper together.

Spread the tomato mixture in the oven dish and layer the eggplant slices on top of it. Add more sauce and then follow with cheese. Repeat the layers until you reach the top of the dish or until the ingredients are finished. Top with the remaining cheese.

Bake for another 20 to 30 minutes, then let it cool for 5 minutes before serving it with fresh basil and white wine.

You can also add other vegetables like mushrooms and squash if you have that in the pantry. This is sure to be another family favorite recipe to enjoy together!

Zucchini Frittata

A frittata is basically a flat omelet that you can fill with whatever vegetables you have, and of course, with some cheese. This dish is healthy and so easy to make. It's a great impromptu brunch recipe, or you can serve it as a main course with a side salad. If you want to exchange the ingredients in this recipe for something else, you are more than welcome to!

Time

35 minutes

Serving size

Serves 2 people

Notes

This recipe is gluten-free, so it's a meal to make when you're having friends or family over with a gluten intolerance. It's also vegetarian, even though meat lovers can choose to add cooked ham.

Ingredients

4 teaspoons of extra virgin olive oil

½ cup of onion, chopped

3-4 chive stalks

½ cup of cherry tomatoes

1 cup zucchini, diced

¼ cup of fresh mint

¼ cup basil

salt and pepper for seasoning

5 large eggs

2 ounces of sliced fresh mozzarella

Directions

Add the olive oil to a skillet and warm it up. Add the onions and cook until it brown. Add the zucchini and cook for a couple of minutes, until tender.

Add the tomatoes, chopped chives, mint, basil, salt, and pepper to the mixture and stir over medium heat for a couple of minutes.

Beat the eggs and some salt together. Add the zucchini mixture to the eggs and add the cheese.

In a clean pan, add a little bit of oil and add the frittata mixture. Don't stir the mixture and leave it for 2 to 4 minutes. Once the top is golden and the egg starts to lift on the side, remove it from the heat.

Cut it into slices and serve.

If you want to add meat, you can add some diced ham or bacon to the frittata mixture before adding it to the pan. You can also garnish the frittata with fresh basil and mint or a couple of tomatoes.

These recipes are just the beginning. I highly recommend investing in a Mediterranean diet cookbook or acquiring a Blue Zone recipe book. Experiment with various flavors, and remember, cooking is an art. Get creative! So, add anything you think would be delicious and put your own twist on these Italian dishes. Whether you're a beginner in the kitchen or a seasoned expert, these recipes are perfect for you. How you'll implement what you've learned on this journey is entirely up to you, so start with what you're putting into your body. Moreover, these recipes are so delicious that you won't even realize you're eating healthy food. As we near the conclusion of this journey together, I encourage you to take some time to reflect on what this experience has meant to you so far and how you can apply the lessons you've learned about longevity.