



An Italian Fire Side Supper

Winter is the ideal time to invite a few friends around for a casual dinner by the fire. Elise Pascoe shares her secrets for a simple Italian supper.

Light the fire and ask friends over to join you for a simple fireside supper. This is one of the easiest ways to entertain, because no one expects too much and all the ingredients could come from your pantry. It is, after all, supposed to be spontaneous. Pack cutlery and napkins into a basket to hand around and take the chill off the bottle of red by setting it near the fire. Plates can be warmed on the hearth and for a bit of guest participation, have the ciabatta sliced with a toasting fork nearby, at the ready.

Getting ahead is the best way for you to enjoy this informal way of entertaining as well as much as your guests. The gorgeously moist and soft cheesecake can be made in the morning and the sauce for the pork dish can be cooked late afternoon so it will be ready to heat through and serve with the pork for dinner.

If the chops are small, allow two per person, but do not overcook them or they will be dry. I love the flavour of the barbecue on the chops but grilling will work well too. For really hungry guests you could add some small chat potatoes to the sauce, par-boiled.

Prepare the salad in advance and make an Italian salad dressing. Italians often use a pinch or two of dried tarragon in the dressing. It lifts it into another realm – so simple and yet surprisingly effective.

COSTA DI MAIALE ALLA SILANA

Pork Chops with Tomatoes, Artichokes and Mushrooms.

Serves 6

6 large pork chops thick cut, trimmed of most fat
Salt flakes and freshly ground black pepper
4 tablespoons olive oil
2 garlic cloves, crushed
400g can of chopped Italian tomatoes
1 teaspoon of sugar

1 teaspoon chopped rosemary spikes
75g mushrooms drained from a jar of mushrooms in olive oil
(you can get these from an Italian grocer shop or deli.)
120g artichoke hearts drained from jar artichokes

Season pork liberally on both sides and set aside on plate until ready to cook. Heat a large, heavy frying pan. Add half the oil, the garlic, tomatoes, sugar and rosemary. Simmer until tomatoes reduce to a sauce consistency, 10-15 minutes approximately. Slice the mushrooms and artichokes and add to the sauce with seasonings. Brush remaining oil over chops and barbeque or grill until almost cooked. Drop chops into sauce and warm through.

Accompany with fire-toasted ciabatta and a crisp green salad dressed with an Italian Vinaigrette.

ITALIAN VINAIGRETTE

1 teaspoon salt flakes
Freshly ground black pepper
1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
1 teaspoon dried tarragon leaves (not powder)
5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

Whisk all ingredients together in the order listed. Taste and adjust seasonings. If too oily, add a dash more vinegar. If too acid, add a little more olive oil.

Dress the green leafy salad within 10 minutes of serving.

TRE FORMAGGIO TORTA

Three Cheese Cake Makes an 18 cm cake

Crust

125 g bought sweet biscuits
50 g unsalted butter, melted
2 1/2 tablespoons caster sugar

Filling

125 g fresh ricotta
125 g cream cheese
250 g mascarpone
3/4 cup caster sugar
Finely grated rind of 1 large lemon
2 large eggs

Cream

200 ml cream, whipped to soft peaks
Finely shredded lemon rind
(use a marmalade shredder)



Crush the biscuits in a food processor or in a plastic bag using a rolling pin. Add the melted butter and sugar and mix well. Line the base of a 18 cm spring form with a circle of baking paper. Spray with canola spray. Press the crust on to the base and refrigerate until firm for about 30 minutes.

To make the filling:

Preheat the oven on 180 C. In a food processor mix the 3 cheeses together with the sugar, lemon rind and eggs until smooth. Pour into the prepared form and cook until the cake tests done, 30 – 35 minutes approximately. Cool cake in the form.

Spread the whipped cream over the top of the cake and top with lemon rind.



The Wine

A Shoalhaven Coast Malbec from The Silos Estate pairs nicely with the chops. It's a soft, dry medium-bodied wine, red brick in colour with purple hues. It displays mixed berry fruit aromas with a spicy palate, complementing the pork dish perfectly.

Malbec is a grape not commonly used as a straight varietal but the 2003 vintage stands alone. The Silos has produced its Mostly Malbec for the past eight years.

The Silos Mostly Malbec 2003
Cellar door price \$20

Opposite page: wicker food cover from Huckleberry Home, Berry.

This page: flowers from Miss Shelley's Flowers, Berry; vase from Huckleberry Home, Berry.

