

Creamy Parmesan Polenta with Sautéed Cherry Tomatoes and Fresh Mozzarella

Total Time: 1 hour, 15 minutes

Preparation Time: 30 minutes

Active Cooking Time: 45 minutes

Yield: 4 servings

Make Ahead: Serve immediately

Difficulty: Easy

Ingredients

Polenta

7½ Cups water

1½ Teaspoons table salt

Pinch baking soda *

1½ Cups coarse-ground degerminated cornmeal * *

2 Tablespoons unsalted butter

4 Ounces good-quality Parmesan cheese , plus extra for serving * * *

ground black pepper

Topping

3 Tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 garlic cloves

Pinch red pepper flakes

Pinch sugar

2 Pints cherry tomatoes

table salt

ground black pepper

6 Ounces fresh mozzarella cheese * * * *

2 Tablespoons thinly sliced fresh basil leaves

* Do not omit the baking soda—it reduces the cooking time and makes for a creamier polenta.

* * Coarse-ground degerminated cornmeal such as yellow grits (with grains the size of couscous) works best in this recipe. Avoid instant and quick-cooking products, as well as whole-grain, stone-ground, and regular cornmeal.

* * * Parmigiano-Reggiano is what true Italian-made Parmesan cheese is called. It is produced according to a strict set of standards, and production is closely regulated. In a tasting of Parmigiano-Reggiano and domestically made Parmesan cheeses, the domestic versions didn't even come close to matching the complexity and texture of the real deal. For best results, use genuine Parmigiano-Reggiano in this polenta—it's well worth the expense.

* * * * Use fresh mozzarella cheese here—the type that is usually sold as balls packed in liquid. Do not use the type of low-moisture mozzarella cheese that is used for topping pizza.

Tools

Rasp grater

Traditional saucepan (large) *

Wooden spoon

Whisk

Flame tamer * *

Cutting board

Chef's knife

Instructions

Prepare Polenta Ingredients

1. Grate 4 ounces Parmesan cheese. You should have about 2 cups.

Bring Water to Boil

2. Bring 7 1/2 cups water to boil in heavy-bottomed 4-quart saucepan over medium-high heat.

3. Stir in 1 1/2 teaspoons table salt and pinch baking soda.

Add Cornmeal

4. Slowly pour 1 1/2 cups cornmeal into water in steady stream, while stirring back and forth with wooden spoon or rubber spatula.

5. Bring mixture to boil, stirring constantly, about 1 minute.

6. Reduce heat to lowest possible setting and cover.

Whisk Polenta, then Cook

7. After 5 minutes, whisk polenta to smooth out any lumps that may have formed, about 15 seconds. (Make sure to scrape down sides and bottom of pan.)

8. Cover and continue to cook, without stirring, until grains of polenta are tender but slightly al dente, about 25 minutes longer. (Polenta will be loose.)

Prepare Topping Ingredients

9. While polenta cooks, peel and thinly slice 2 garlic cloves.

10. Cut 2 pints cherry tomatoes in half.

11. Cut 6 ounces mozzarella cheese into 1/2-inch cubes. You should have about 1 cup.

12. Thinly slice basil leaves to yield 2 tablespoons.

Finish Polenta

13. Remove polenta from heat, stir in 2 tablespoons butter and Parmesan, and season to taste with black pepper.

14. Let stand, covered, 5 minutes.

Make Topping

15. While polenta rests, heat 3 tablespoons olive oil, garlic, pinch pepper flakes, and pinch sugar in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until sizzling, about 1 minute.

16. Stir in tomatoes and cook until they just begin to soften, about 1 minute.

17. Season to taste with salt and pepper and remove from heat.

Top Polenta

18. Spoon polenta into individual serving bowls.

19. Spoon tomato mixture with any accumulated juices over polenta.

20. Top with mozzarella, sprinkle with basil, and serve immediately.

Nonstick skillet (12-inch)

Liquid measuring cup

Dry measuring cups

Measuring spoons

* Make sure to choose a heavy-bottomed 4-quart saucepan for this recipe. Polenta can scorch if cooked in a lightweight pan.

** The polenta should do little more than release wisps of steam as it cooks. If it bubbles or sputters even slightly after the first 10 minutes of cooking, the heat is too high and you may need a flame tamer (aka heat diffuser)—a metal disk for fitting over the burner (electric or gas) that tempers the heat transfer. If you don't own a flame tamer (most kitchenware and well-stocked hardware stores sell them) and you have a gas stove, you can fashion a flame tamer from aluminum foil. Take a long sheet of foil and shape it into a 1-inch thick ring that will fit on the burner. Make sure that the ring is of an even thickness so that a pot will sit level on it.

Step By Step



1. Grate 4 ounces Parmesan cheese. You should have about 2 cups.



2. Bring 7 1/2 cups water to boil in heavy-bottomed 4-quart saucepan over medium-high heat.