

## 2

### Major Foods and Ingredients

---

Because of its long history, the diverse and prolonged influences of neighboring populations, and local differences, Italian cuisine presents a stunning variety of products, food, and dishes. This inexhaustible bounty can be confusing to foreigners, and even Italians find it difficult to master. Italians are usually quite knowledgeable about foods and dishes that have nationwide diffusion and distribution. The contemporary food industry, increasingly important after World War II, makes sure that all Italians are familiar with mass-produced items such as pasta, canned vegetables, tuna fish, stock cubes, or coffee. These items are normally easy to find and affordable, which makes them particularly appealing. Companies are also trying to differentiate their offerings, creating high-end brands that give consumers the impression they are buying exclusive products. Many of these are marketed by employing images and concepts of a mythical, long-gone rural Arcadia that never actually existed but nevertheless is able to attract consumers who choose products to try to connect to their roots. In fact, internal migration and the subsequent urbanization of a large part of the population caused the abandonment of rural and small town lifestyles, which often provoked a crisis of local food productions. In recent years, though, local traditions, and, above all, artisanal food, have been rediscovered. Rare specialties produced in tiny quantities have become gourmet items, reaching high prices and enjoying new renown. The Italian government and local authorities are both creating rules and codes to regulate those products and ensure quality, while obtaining recognition from the European Union and protecting these specialties from counterfeits.

On the other hand, some of these products, which actually have acquired the status of cultural identity symbols, are defended against the European Union's attempts to implement regulations that would endanger them. This is the case with nonpasteurized cheese, or cheese matured in caves in the ground, which is considered unhealthy by some EU agencies.

Due to this complex and shifting situation, the best approach to Italian food is to describe the different products one by one, highlighting the traditions related to them, the local differences, and their use in the national and local cuisine.

### WHEAT, BREAD, AND PIZZA

Grains, such as wheat, rice, and corn, constitute the main staple in Italian cuisine. Wheat, both in the hard and soft varieties, provides the bulk of dietary calories in the form of flour, bread, pasta, pizza, and such. The quantity of wheat actually harvested in Italy is now limited: although wheat is grown in Puglia, Sicily, and Sardinia, most of it is imported from other countries, such as Canada or Ukraine. Soft wheat is grown in the plain of the river Po. Flour is found in many types, but the basic distinction is between flours deriving from durum wheat, mainly used to produce dried pasta, and those from soft wheat, classified in many categories: 0 and 00 types, the most refined ones, are used to make fresh pasta and pastry. Types 0, 1, and 2, which are less refined and hence tastier, are employed in the production of bread. Flours 1 and 2 are not easy to find for private customers and they are usually sold in bulk to bakeries. Gluten-rich flour coming from Canada, usually called American or Manitoba, is used to make cakes that require leavened dough.

The majority of the population consumes different types of breads, depending on personal taste and local habits, at every meal. Most breads are leavened, with the notable exception of *pialina*, a round and thin unleavened sheet of dough to which some fat—usually lard or oil—and baking soda are added to increase softness and lightness. *Piadinas*, a very popular fast food in Romagna, are usually cooked over a burning hot slab of stone, acquiring uneven color and crunchiness, and eaten warm together with *prosciutto* or some equivalent of cottage cheese. The same slab of stone, called *testo*, is also used to prepare *testaroli*, a local specialty in the northern tip of Tuscany. A fluffy, almost liquid dough made of flour and water is cooked in thin sheets over the stone, then broken into pieces, dropped in boiling water and, once strained, seasoned with pesto. Simple water and flour dough, with the occasional dash of olive oil but no leaven, is also

used to make *cialde* or *ferratelle*. These are small pieces of the dough pressed between two flat metal slabs operated like a sort of heavy pliers with long arms, which are successively placed over the fire until the *cialda* is cooked.

Leavened dough, on the other hand, is employed to make all kinds of breads. It is virtually impossible to list all the different kinds of bread one can find in Italy. Breads can be broadly divided into salted and unsalted ones, the unsalted being more common in central Italy, especially Tuscany, Umbria, and Lazio. As to sizes, they vary enormously, but usually consumers can either buy single-portion breads, between 1 and 2 ounces each, or big loaves that can weigh up to 4 or 5 pounds. Breads are used during the meal to accompany any *secondo*, or main dish. For this reason everything that is not bread is called *companatico*, a word of Latin origin that literally means "with bread." Many people enjoy soaking pieces of bread in the sauce of their *secondo*, a practice frowned upon in formal meals. Slices of bread are often grilled and seasoned with all kinds of ingredients, including salt, olive oil, garlic, and tomato, to make *bruschetta*. Single-portion breads, or *panini*, cut in two and filled with all kinds of food, are also eaten outside the meal, often actually constituting a light meal by themselves. *Panini* are consumed as a form of lunch by those working far from home, traveling, or at picnics. As a matter of fact, most grocery shops are often willing to fix *panini*, which can also be bought already made at coffeehouses and gourmet shops.

Bread dough is traditionally used in Piedmont to make *grissini*, long, thin crunchy sticks with or without oil or butter. *Grissini* are now easy to find in the breadbaskets of most Italian restaurants, often eaten with *antipasti* or while waiting for the main dish.

A particular form of bread is the Sardinian *carta da musica*, or "music sheet," very thin, crunchy, round sheets of leavened dough that are passed several times in the oven with weights on top to keep them flat. They are used in many preparations, such as *pane fratau*: the sheets are soaked in hot water and covered with crushed tomatoes, grated *pecorino* cheese, and a poached egg.

Leavened dough is also the main ingredient of pizza, a dish so common all over the world that many people have forgotten its Italian origins. Pizza can be cooked in the oven without any toppings, simply seasoned with a dash of olive oil, salt, and some herbs. In this case it is usually called *focaccia*, but also *pizza bianca*, or "white pizza," is a common denomination. A famous kind of *pizza bianca* is the one originally made in Genoa, but now spread all over the country, which is very thick but at the same

fluffy and delicate. More often, pizza is enriched by all kinds of toppings. The thickness of pizza varies depending on the local customs. For instance, in Naples it is thicker than in Rome, where it is extremely thin. The most traditional kinds of pizza are *margherita* (fresh tomato, buffalo mozzarella, and basil), and *napoletana*, with salted anchovies, but now all kinds of pizza are available, from the common mushroom, cheese, sausage, or *prosciutto* tops to the new creations with zucchini blossoms, salmon, or arugula. Nevertheless, Hawaiian pizza is unheard of, and the very idea of putting sweet ingredients on pizza sounds whimsical. The only exception is white pizza stuffed with Nutella, a hazelnut and chocolate spread, or with fresh figs. Pizza can be either eaten at the restaurant—in which case it is round and served on a dish—or in special pizza shops where pizzas are made in bigger rectangular pans and sold by the weight.

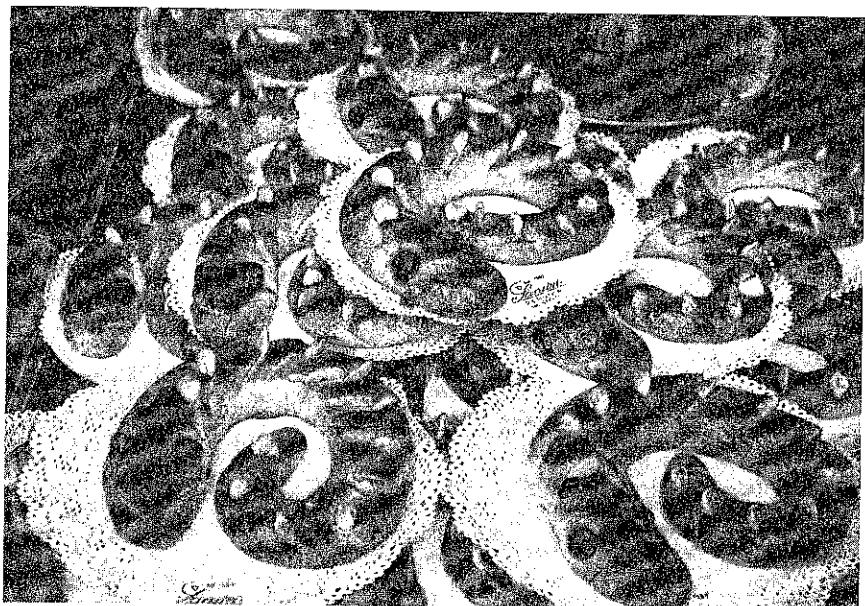
*Calzone* is an oven-cooked pizza folded in half and filled with ingredients that in Naples, its place of origin, are ricotta cheese, diced mozzarella, diced salami or *prosciutto*, and egg. Outside of Naples the filling varies, but it is usually without ricotta.

Besides bread and pizzas, wheat flour is also employed to make couscous in western Sicily, the only area of the country where this Middle Eastern dish can still be found. Sicilian couscous is usually served with vegetables or fish.

Flour is also used to make savory tarts or *torte rustiche*, using different sorts of dough depending on the area. In Liguria, tarts are made of the so-called crazy dough, or *pasta matta*, a simple and light mix of flour, water, and olive oil, usually quite thin and filled with fresh ingredients, mostly vegetables. In Abruzzo, on the other hand, a sort of phillo dough made with flour, eggs, and lard is filled with more substantial food, such as sausages, diced hard-boiled eggs, salami, and different kinds of vegetables. In most of the southern areas, people favor bread dough to prepare savory tarts, with fillings that vary even from village to village. In recent years, since frozen phillo dough has become largely available, savory tarts are easier to find everywhere in Italy and are also often homemade; a popular filling is ricotta and spinach.

### PASTRIES AND CAKES

It would be impossible to make a complete list of all the traditional Italian pastry recipes based on wheat flour. Every area, if not every single town, is known for different cookies, tarts, and pies. Éclairs (called *bigné*, *paste*, or *pastarelle*) with all kinds of fillings are easy to find in any pastry



Locally made pastry in the shape of a snake, Perugia. © TRIP/L. Tribe

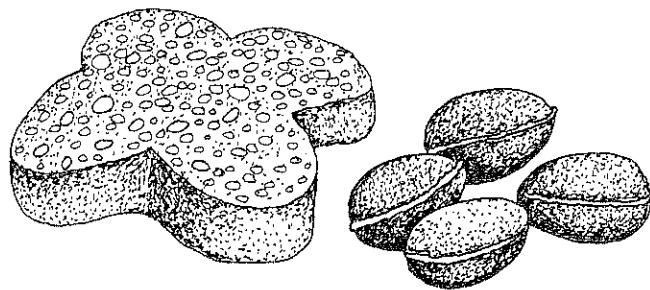
shop, often in two sizes: a larger one and a tiny one, called *mignon*. Fillings may include chocolate, egg custard, *zabaione* (made by cooking egg yolks in Bain Marie together with sugar and *marsala* sweet wine), hazelnut, coffee cream, and plain or sweetened whipped cream. The origin of the name *zabaione* is debated: Some think it comes from the Arabic root *zabada*, meaning "to churn milk or to foam"; others connect it with Saint Pasquale Baylon, protector of pastry chefs (San Baylon). Especially in the morning, pastry shops also display a choice of different croissants and other small pastries made of leavened dough enriched with butter. Croissants often have different fillings, such as chocolate, raisins, cream, or almonds. Other small pastries vary according to the different areas: In Naples, for instance, *babà* are made of very fluffy dough drenched in rum and sugar, while *sfogliatelle* present a layered and crunchy dough filled with cream and boiled wheat grain. Many pastries are made of fried dough with different fillings: If they are big, round, sprinkled in granulated sugar and filled with cream or chocolate, they are known as *bombe*. If they are smaller and filled with cream, they are called *bigné di San Giuseppe* (Saint Joseph's pastry) in Rome, or *zeppole* in Naples. Doughnut-shaped fried pastries are rather named *frittelle*. For Carnevale, the Italian equivalent of

Mardi Gras, long stripes of crunchy fried dough powdered with sugar, called *frappe*, *cenci*, or *chiacchiere*, and little fried balls covered in melted honey, or *castagnole*, are particularly popular. Tiny balls of fried dough, dipped in honey syrup, arranged in a wreath, and decorated with colored spangles, are called *struffoli*, and are a Christmas dessert in Naples. Also the dough for the renowned Sicilian *cannoli*, filled with a ricotta cheese-based cream, is actually fried. In Sardinia, *seadas*, shaped like ravioli and filled with fresh cheese, are fried and covered with honey.

Baked desserts and pies are also very common, both homemade and commercial. The word *biscotti* literally means "twice-cooked" and derives from the custom of baking the dough in slabs, cutting it into smaller pieces, and placing them in the oven again to dry, so that the lack of humidity allows them to stay fresh longer. The same method is used to make *fette biscottate*, very airy and crunchy slices of sweet leavened dough that are usually consumed for breakfast. There are many kinds of *biscotti*, often with other ingredients such as raisins, dried fruit, nuts, almonds, and pieces of chocolate. They vary according to the different areas and times of the year, particularly holidays. Although many still enjoy making their own cookies at home, above all on special occasions, most people buy them from bakeries and pastry shops. Commercial brands produced by food industries and sold in grocery shops and supermarkets are also extremely popular. A specific variety of cookies called *savoiardi* (which are similar to lady fingers), are used to make the popular *tiramisù*. The cookies, soaked in liquors and coffee, are placed in layers and covered with a cream made of *mascarpone* cheese (a sort of cream cheese), eggs, and coffee. The cake is then dusted with powdered cocoa.

*Crostata* is a thin layer of *pasta frolla* (quite similar to shortbread, made of flour and butter) spread over the bottom of a pan, topped with homemade jam or fruit preserves, and baked. The *crostata di frutta*, on the other hand, is covered by a thin layer of custard cream and decorated with thinly sliced fresh fruit. *Pastiera*, a typical pie from Naples, is also made with a sort of shortbread, filled with ricotta cheese, boiled wheat grains, diced candied citron, and scented with orange flower water. Shortbread pies, similar to *crostata* in that they have no dough top, are commonly served in restaurants like desserts. The fillings can be ricotta, often with the addition of small pieces of chocolate (*torta di ricotta*) or custard cream, with toasted pine nuts on top (*torta della nonna*).

Many desserts use a sort of sponge cake, or *pandispagna*, as a base. It can be used to make multilayered cakes with various cream fillings, usually called *torte*. When the cake is made with slices of sponge cake soaked in



Colomba and chocolate eggs.

liquors, layered in a mold, and filled with vanilla and chocolate cream, it is then known as *zuppa inglese*. Some prefer *pandispagna* to make *tiramisù*, instead of *savoiardi*. The famous Sicilian *cassata* is also made with *pandispagna* filled with a cream made of ricotta cheese, sugar, candied fruits, and pieces of chocolate, covered with a thick frosting of white sugar and decorated with candied fruits.

The baked cakes that achieved the widest international recognition and popularity are *panettone* and *pandoro*, the Christmas cakes of Milan and Verona. It is possible to buy them in both artisanal and mass-produced styles, and the latter is also distributed in the United States. The artisanal ones are definitely better, but they are quite expensive and not as easy to find. The traditional *panettone* is light and airy, with raisins and candied fruit, and the top is often covered with an almond frosting. Now food industries flood the market with new types, with creative fillings, different fillings, or no candied fruits. Another baked dessert with dough reminiscent of *panettone* is the Easter *colomba* cake, which is shaped like a dove, as the name suggests. *Pandoro*, despite the great quantity of butter it contains, is lighter and puffier than *panettone*, usually baked in a high eight-pointed star-shaped pan and dusted with confectioner's sugar. Also *pandoro* is industrially produced in different and imaginative ways, but purists tend to prefer the classic, artisanal ones.

## PASTA

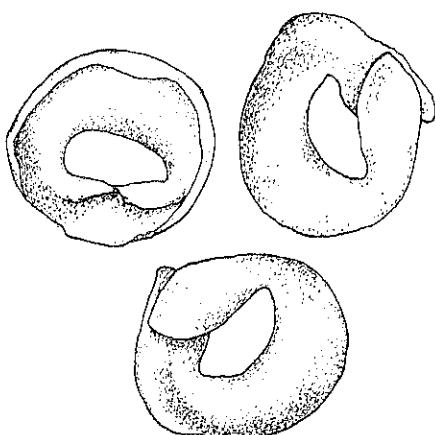
The main Italian staple made of wheat flour is certainly pasta.<sup>1</sup> Kneading flour, often from soft wheat, with water or eggs makes fresh pasta. Homemade fresh pasta or *pasta fresca* has become increasingly rare, because it is now possible to buy it in specialized shops, which usually pro-

duce it with the help of machinery. To make pasta at home, flour is poured on a wooden plank in the shape of a volcano, often referred to as *fontana* or fountain. Water is poured in small quantities in the central hollow in the flour, allowing cooks to knead it into a dough starting from the center and adding water as they incorporate more flour in the dough. To give pasta different colors, sometimes tomato or spinach are added, but in that case less water or eggs are required, because the vegetables tend to increase the amount of humidity.

Once the dough is ready, it is kneaded in different ways. To make *fettuccine* or *tagliatelle*, for example, the dough would be flattened into a thin sheet or *sfoglia* with the aid of a wooden rolling pin and then cut into long ribbons with a knife. Obtaining an even, smooth *sfoglia* is no small deal: In Bologna the *sfogline*, or *sfoglia* women, who are in charge of this delicate operation, command high respect. Many cooks use a pasta rolling machine, operated by a manual or electric crank, composed of heavy metal cylinders between which the dough is rolled until it reaches the required thinness. Some of these cylinders also cut the pasta in the desired shapes. Once ready, the pasta must dry to lose excess humidity before it is dropped in boiling water to cook. Especially in the south, Italians like their pasta *al dente*, which means, literally, "hard to the tooth." Overcooked pasta is often frowned upon.

To make *lasagne* or *cannelloni*, *sfoglia* is cut into squares or rectangles. For *cannelloni*, the squares are rolled and filled with meat, mozzarella, or vegetables, usually spinach. When making *lasagna*, the squares of pasta are placed in layers in a pan, with a filling in between layers that can contain meat, grated *parmigiano reggiano*, and béchamel sauce. *Lasagna* is then covered with sauce, diced mozzarella, and cheese and passed in the oven. Different versions of this dish are found in many regions of Italy. In Marche, for instance, butter and some drops of sweet wine like *Vin Santo* or *Marsala* are added to the dough, and the filling includes different kinds of offal. The resulting *lasagna* is called *vincisgrassi*. In many southern areas, a special pie called *timballo* is made: A pan is covered with *sfoglia* and then filled with cooked pasta such as *maccheroni* or *penne*, and then meat sauce, mozzarella, vegetables, mushrooms, and eggs are added. The pie is cooked in the oven and then cut in slices.

*Pasta ripiena*, or filled pasta, such as *ravioli*, *agnolotti*, and *tortelli*, are all square shaped, and *tortellini*, which is bite-sized rings, are conceptually similar to the above-mentioned *cannelloni* and *lasagna*. A small square of thin, fresh pasta is filled with various ingredients, usually meat, cheese,



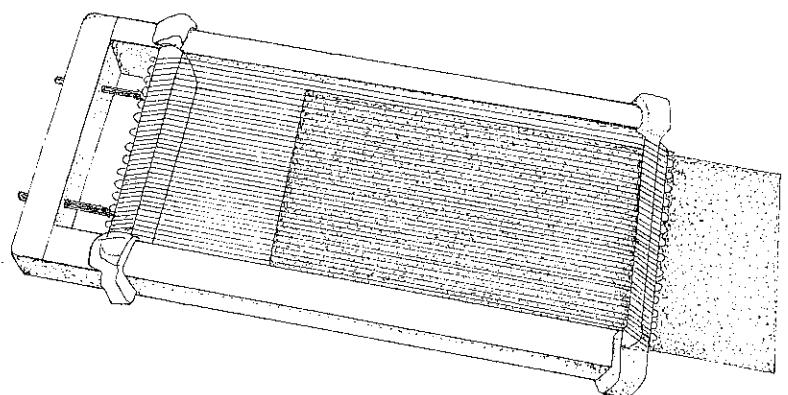
Tortellini.

and bread crumbs.<sup>2</sup> In the vegetarian versions, ricotta cheese and spinach are often used for the filling: These are called *ravioli di magro*, which means, literally, "lean," referring to the days when the religious calendar excluded the consumption of meat, which was considered fat. In Abruzzo, the ricotta-filled *ravioli* are sometimes sweetened with sugar, even if the light tomato sauce used to season them is savory. There are different theories about the origin of *pasta ripiena*: It could have been a method to recycle whatever was left over from a banquet, especially meat and the slices of bread that were used as dishes. This would explain the frequent presence of bread crumbs in the filling. Another theory considers this kind of pasta as a way to enjoy all the best the market and the pantry of a wealthy house could offer; hence the presence of *parmigiano*, *prosciutto*, and spices in the *tortellini* from Bologna and braised or roasted meat in the *agnolotti* from Piedmont. Others connect *pasta ripiena* with dumplings made of meat and other ingredients, not wrapped with dough, which are mentioned in recipe books from the Middle Ages and which still exist in Trentino, like *canederli*, big round balls made of bread, smoked ham, and liver that are cooked in boiling water. Whatever the origin, *pasta ripiena* is an all-time favorite in all its versions. It is usually consumed in meat broth or seasoned with melted butter, more rarely with heavy cream or sauce. An unusual type of *tortelli* is made in the city of Mantova, in Emilia, with a filling composed of pumpkin, *amaretto* cookies, and *mostarda*, candied fruits in syrup spiced by mustard seeds. The sweetness of the filling is bal-

anced by melted butter and sage used to season the ravioli. In recent years, new *pasta ripiena* has been created to boost sales and give consumers a wider choice of unusual treats. Filling can vary from all kind of vegetables to fish and lobster, but the concept remains the same.

Besides *pasta ripiena*, shapes of homemade fresh pasta vary according to local traditions. In Piedmont, thinly cut and thick *fettuccine* with some grated *parmigiano reggiano* in the dough are called *tajarin*, usually cooked in a soup together with beans, *lardo* (cured pork fat), onion, potatoes, and other ingredients.<sup>3</sup> The *garganelli* from Romagna are made with a dough with grated *parmigiano reggiano* and nutmeg; the *sfoglia* is cut in squares that are then wrapped around a thin stick and rubbed against a sort of comb that gives them an uneven surface. In Puglia, people are particularly fond of *orecchiette*. The dough is kneaded into long, thin cylinders and then cut in small pieces that are shaped to suggest an ear (hence the name, which means "small ears"). The process is carried out by hand, with swift finger movements that are mastered only with practice. In Abruzzo, *spaghetti alla chitarra* are very popular: large and long rectangles of pasta are placed on top of a special tool, called a *chitarra* or "guitar," made of thin metal strings pulled over a wooden frame. With the help of a rolling pin, the pasta is pressed and cut through the strings in the shape of thick spaghetti with a square section. In the Veneto region, *bigoli* are made by pressing dough through a little extruder and by cooking it without drying it for very long.

A peculiar type of dough that cannot actually be considered pasta is the *passatelli* from Romagna. A liquid mixture of bread crumbs, beef marrow, eggs, and nutmeg is passed through a skimmer directly into boiling broth.



Chitarra.

While in the past fresh pasta was more common in the northern and central part of the peninsula, until the late nineteenth century *pasta secca*, or "dried pasta," was mainly limited to southern Italy. The reason for this geographical difference is probably that dried pasta is made with durum wheat, mainly grown in the south, and it also requires a less humid climate to dry more quickly and uniformly. These conditions were clearly absent in most of northern regions, with the exception of Liguria, which, for its mild climate, has been an important pasta-producing region since the thirteenth century.

In recent years pasta industrial producers have been trying to introduce new shapes, but usually with little success. To widen consumers' choices, they now prefer to rediscover old or almost forgotten traditional or local shapes and mass-produce them. Nevertheless, numerous small companies still make dried pasta in a more traditional way, defined as *artigianale*. The difference lies in the material of the dies in the pasta-extruding machinery. While big producers employ plastic or aluminum alloy dies, which allows faster production and shorter drying periods, the makers of pasta *artigianale* stick to the more traditional bronze dies, the surfaces of which make machines work slower, but at the same time ensure a rougher surface to the final product. Because of this, sauce adheres better to the pasta.

Different pasta shapes tend to be used with different sauces and condiments according to local tradition or nationwide habits. New combinations are acceptable and are actually implemented, but some long-lasting pairings are maintained, and in this case variations are frowned upon. For instance, the Italian-American dish spaghetti bolognese is virtually unheard of in Italy. In Bologna, spaghetti would never be seasoned with the minced meat and tomato sauce that gets its name from the city, used only for *tagliatelle* or *fettuccine*. *Linguine* (a kind of slightly flatter spaghetti) would normally be used with *pesto* or fish and seafood-based sauces, but seldom with meat. Spaghetti are probably the most versatile kind of pasta: They can be served *carbonara* style (with onions, bacon, and eggs), *aglio e olio* (just garlic sautéed in olive oil with some red chili pepper), or with a simple tomato and basil sauce. *Bucatini* (thick spaghetti in the shape of a thin pipe) are popular with *amatriciana* sauce (pork cured cheek or *guanciale*, onions, crushed fresh tomatoes).

Pasta is not only seasoned with sauces. In recent years it has not been rare to see it used as the main ingredient in cold salads that are particularly popular in summer, especially with young people who do not particularly like to cook. Tossing a few ingredients together with boiled pasta can make a quick dish for dinner or a party.

## SOUPS

Pasta is also a very common ingredient in vegetable soups or *minestre*, also called *minestrone*: Vegetables and herbs are cooked together with different kinds of pasta, sometimes with potatoes or beans added to increase the thickness. Although regional and local habits determine which vegetables, herbs, and pasta go together, this kind of dish is widely popular all over the peninsula. When pasta is absent, this dish is called *zuppa*. In Liguria and Tuscany, olive oil is the main fat ingredient in the *minestrone*, while in other parts of the country it is not unusual to find minced lard, pork rinds, or prosciutto in these dishes. The most common *minestra* is probably the ubiquitous and simple *pasta e fagioli* (pasta and bean soup), particularly popular in Veneto but otherwise appreciated all over Italy. Carrots, celery, cabbage, squash, chickpeas, peas, fava beans, and artichokes are some of the vegetables used in *minestre*, which were perceived in the years of industrialization as a legacy of poverty and backward life, or at least exclusively considered as comfort food. Starting from the 1980s, these dishes have been rediscovered as elements of a cultural identity that risked disappearing, while their health value is now highly appreciated, constituting an important element of what nowadays is called a Mediterranean diet.

The richest *minestra* is probably the *virtù* (virtues), a traditional dish prepared at the beginning of spring in Abruzzo, with at least seven kinds of dried pulse, seven fresh vegetables, seven kinds of pasta, cheese, lard, prosciutto, and pork rinds. In the local rural culture, whatever was left in the cupboard after the cold and dreary days of winter ended up in the boiling pot, so that the *virtù* symbolized the passage to the new season.<sup>4</sup>

### Tuscan Tomato and Bread Soup (*Pappa al Pomodoro*)

- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely minced
- 1 stalk celery, finely minced
- 1 medium carrot, finely minced
- 1 clove garlic, finely minced
- 1 tablespoon finely minced parsley
- 3 cups stale Italian bread, crust removed, cut into 1 inch cubes
- 1 1/2 pound red tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 4 basil leaves, minced

- salt
- pepper

Heat the olive oil in a soup pot over medium heat. Add the onion, celery, carrot, garlic, and parsley, and sauté until the vegetables are soft. Add the bread and stir for a couple of minutes. Add the tomatoes, let cook for 5 minutes, and then add the warm broth. Season with salt and pepper. Reduce the heat and let simmer, uncovered, till the bread dissolves into a thick, creamy soup. Remove from the heat and allow the soup to rest for 20 minutes. Serve at room temperature, garnishing each portion with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil and a sprinkling of basil.

## RICE

Rice is widely used in *minestre* instead of pasta. In Veneto, dense and thick vegetable and rice soups are very popular, the most renowned being *riso e bisi*, rice and peas. The grains are poured into the boiling broth, in such quantities that at the end of the preparation they absorb most of the liquid. Peas and other ingredients are added at the end, so that they do not melt in the soup. Another traditional way of cooking rice is *risotto*. The grains are first sautéed in butter and onion until they become translucent, and then hot meat broth is added slowly, ladle after ladle, while stirring and waiting for each ladle of broth to be absorbed before adding another.

This process is carried out in a pot without a lid. This is the main difference with the Turkish style *pilaff* rice, in which the pot is filled with broth, covered, and put into the oven till the liquid is absorbed. Nevertheless, the cooking process is quite similar, giving good reasons for scholars to consider an Oriental origin for the diffusion of rice in Italy. It is not certain how rice became a staple in Italy, since until the Middle Ages it was mainly used as a thickening agent or an ingredient in medicine. It is certain that Muslim peoples grew rice in Sicily during their domination there and that the Crusaders brought the cereal back from the Holy Land, but rice never became popular in the south.

At the end of the Renaissance, we already find it as a staple in northern Italy, in the plains along the Po River, especially in the Piedmont areas of Vercelli and Novara, and around the cities of Mantova and Pavia in Lombardy. Innumerable rice recipes are available in these regions. The most famous one is probably the *risotto alla milanese*, cooked with saffron. In Piedmont we find the *risotto all'albese*, named after the city of Alba, with shaved truffle and roasted meat gravy; the *risotto* with frog meat (before the use of chemicals in agriculture, the rice pads in the area provided plenty of fresh frogs); and the *paniscia*, where the rice is sautéed in onion,

*lardo*, and a special salami called *d' la duja*, before adding broth and other ingredients. In Lombardy, besides the already mentioned rice with frog meat and *risotto alla milanese*, people are fond of *risotto* made with different kinds of freshwater fish, depending on the area (crawfish, perch, pike, or tench). Around Mantova *riso alla pilotta* is particularly popular: The grains are boiled and then seasoned with grated *parmigiano reggiano* and ground-up salami and meat previously sautéed in butter.

In recent years, fish-based *risotto* (*risotto alla pescatora*) has become very popular in all its possible versions, often with the addition of fresh tomatoes to give it more color. These dishes seem to have conquered the southern regions, where rice, though well known, was never considered a staple.

In the south, rice was mainly used for special dishes, often boiled and then fried in small balls, filled with different ingredients and powdered with bread crumbs. In this category, we can list *supplì* in Rome, where the rice is seasoned with tomato sauce and filled with diced mozzarella before frying, and *arancini* in Sicily, containing usually peas or ham. Rice would also be the main ingredient for special festive dishes. We can mention the Sicilian *tummalà*, a gratin made of *risotto* and different kinds of boiled and roasted meat, the *tiella di riso, cozze e patate* (a casserole of rice, mussels, and potatoes) in Puglia, cooked in a ceramic crock pot in the oven, and the Neapolitan *sartù*, a semispherical pie filled with *prosciutto*, tiny meatballs, mozzarella, and provolone cheese.<sup>5</sup> Southern populations got acquainted with rice as an everyday staple only after the unification of Italy, when they were required to join the Army and were often served overcooked rice soups that at first did not help making the cereal more palatable.

Italian rice grains tend to be more rounded than varieties from other countries. From the commercial point of view, rice is classified in four categories that show different degrees of resistance to heat: *comune* or *originario* types (including varieties such as Balilla or Raffaello); *semifino* (the most renowned variety is Vialone Nano); and *fino* and *superfino*, among which are the most famous Arborio, Carnaroli, and Baldo varieties. When they cook, Italian rice varieties tend to release starch and thus are particularly good for creamy *risotto* or thick soups.

In the past 20 years, rice salads have become common dishes. Just like pasta salads, they constitute a practical way to assemble a fast meal without too much work. Rice salads are usually consumed in summer. Boiled cold rice is mixed with all kinds of ingredients, according to the cook's taste. These dishes require different kinds of rice than the ones traditionally grown in Italy: The results are best when the grains stay separated, yet fully cooked. Precisely for this reason, long-grain rice, such as the U.S. Carolina rice, have become popular, together with parboiled rice.

**Mussel and Potato Rice Casserole from Puglia**

- 3 pounds fresh mussels
- 1 1/2 pounds starchy potatoes, such as Yukon Gold
- 1 pound fresh zucchini
- 1 pound white onions
- 1 pound short-grain rice, such as *arborio*
- 5 ounces grated Romano cheese
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium ripe tomato, sliced
- salt
- pepper

Clean the mussels with a stiff brush and place them in a large pan with some water. Cover the pan and put it over medium heat, until the mussels open. Discard any unopened mussels. Remove the mussels and filter the liquid left in the pan through a fine sieve to eliminate all traces of sand. When cool, remove the top shell of each mussel, leaving the mussels attached on the half shell.

Peel the potatoes and cut them in 1/8-inch slices. Wash and thoroughly dry the zucchini. Trim the ends and cut into 1/8-inch slices. Peel and slice the onions. Mix the raw rice with the grated cheese and the parsley. Season it with salt and pepper.

Lightly oil the bottom of a large baking dish or, better, a glazed earthenware pot, with 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Cover the bottom with half of the sliced onions and layer some mussels over the onions very close to each other. Cover with a layer of potatoes, then a layer of zucchini, and finally a layer of rice. Repeat the layering, starting with the onions. Remember that the last layer must be potatoes and that the dish must not be full to the brim, because the rice tends to expand when cooked. Arrange the tomato slices on top for decoration, and pour the reserved mussel juice over all the ingredients. Add enough warm water to reach the last layer. Pour the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil on top of the casserole. Cover with foil and bake at 350°F for 45 minutes, until the liquid is completely absorbed and the potatoes are tender. Let sit for 15 minutes before serving.

**MAIZE**

While wheat and rice have been grown in Italy for centuries, maize (called *mais* or *granturco*, Turkish grain, to express its exotic origins) was introduced only in the sixteenth century, enjoying an almost immediate popularity, especially in the northern regions of Italy. Its popularity spread so far that in certain areas of Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia, it almost

replaced any other grains. These Italian populations had not learned to treat maize with alkaline substances to avoid a lack of vitamins such as B12. Because in times of scarcity maize constituted most of their daily carbohydrate intake, they commonly suffered from a disease derived from insufficient vitamin intake called *pellagra*, which caused skin eruptions. Although corn on the cob is appreciated both grilled and boiled, and corn grains have found their way into cold and warm salads, maize is mainly consumed in the form of *polenta*. Kernels are ground into flour similar to American grits, with the difference that the kernel germ is not eliminated by a soaking in wood ash, lye, or baking soda as in the case of grits. The flour is then slowly simmered in boiling water to various degrees of thickness, according to different recipes and local traditions.

In some areas other ingredients are added during the cooking process. In Piacenza and Reggio, in the Emilia Romagna region, beans or fava beans, together with *lardo* or *pancetta*, are used to flavor *polenta*. In Piedmont, *polenta* is called *cunsa* with the addition of small dices of *toma*, *fontina*, and *parmigiano* cheeses. In Lombardy a mix of ground lard, garlic, and parsley is spread on top (*gras pistà*), while in Veneto various condiments with a dried cod base are preferred. *Polenta* is often simply used as an accompaniment for all kinds of dishes. In this case it is cooked very thick, cut in slices, and then sautéed in a pan or grilled. Slices of *polenta* can be arranged on a low, flat pan, covered with all kinds of seasoning (for example, *gorgonzola* cheese, *porcini* mushrooms, or bacon) and then cooked in the oven to a crisp. Another common way to use *polenta* is to cook it until it is liquid, pour it onto a dish, and cover it with different kinds of tomato sauce, usually with beef meat or sausages. In Veneto, one of the regions where *polenta* is particularly popular, the sauce sometimes is made with horsemeat or even larks in the *polenta con gli osei* (literally, "*polenta* with birds").

#### *Polenta with Porcini Mushrooms*

- 2 quarts (8 cups) water
- salt
- 3/4 pound *polenta* (coarsely ground cornmeal)
- 7 ounces dried *porcini* mushrooms
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 teaspoon fresh parsley, chopped
- 2 tablespoon olive oil
- 3/4 cup whole milk

- 5 ounces imported *fontina* cheese, diced
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 2 tablespoons butter

In a heavy-bottomed pot, bring the 2 quarts of water to a boil. Add salt. Slowly whisk in the *polenta* in a steady stream, stirring continuously so that the *polenta* does not form lumps. After all of the cornmeal is added, let simmer over medium heat for about 40 minutes, stirring with a wooden spoon, until the *polenta* is thick, soft, and smooth. If the *polenta* thickens too quickly, add some hot water.

Meanwhile, soak the dried mushroom in warm water. Drain them and filter the soaking liquid through a very fine sieve to remove any sand. Roughly chop the mushrooms. In a pan, sauté the garlic and the parsley in the olive oil, and then add the mushrooms. Add 2 tablespoons or so of the mushroom water and let simmer for about 10 minutes. Bring the milk to a boil in a pot. Whisk in the cheese, the flour and the butter. Stir until the cheese melts into a smooth fondue.

Divide the *polenta* among the serving dishes. Place the mushroom sauce on top of the *polenta* in the middle and pour the fondue around. Serve hot.

#### OTHER GRAINS

In Valtellina, a valley near Sondrio, corn flour is often found mixed with another grain, buckwheat, and the result is called *polenta taragna*. In Italian, buckwheat is called *grano saraceno* (Saracen wheat), or grain from the Muslim world. It is unclear if the name derives from its dark color or from the fact that it was believed to be introduced to Italy by the Muslims. In the same Valtellina Valley, buckwheat is used to make a special kind of pasta, *pizzocheri*, cooked together with *verza* cabbage and diced potatoes, and then seasoned with garlic and onion sautéed in butter, grated *parmigiano reggiano*, and diced *bitto* (a local cheese). In Valtellina, buckwheat is also the main ingredient for *sciatt*, a sort of pancake fried in lard and flavored with cheese and *grappa*.

Barley and *farro* have also made a comeback in the past few years, appreciated for their high-fiber content and health benefits. Barley, especially the so-called pearled variety, is sometimes ground to a flour, but more often it is used whole in soups. *Farro*, a very ancient cereal native to Italy, is mainly grown in Garfagnana near the town of Lucca, an area in the Northwestern corner of Tuscany, Umbria, and Lazio. Favored for soup, *farro* is also versatile in cold summer salads. Millet, oat, and rye are much less common, used at times to make different kinds of brown breads that in the past decades have become very popular because of their high-fiber content and nutritional value.

### Farro Soup (*Zuppa di Farro*)

- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 ounces *pancetta*, diced
- 1 medium onion, minced
- 1 medium carrot, diced
- 1 medium stalk celery, diced
- 1/2 cup *farro*, soaked for 2 hours and drained
- 1 1/2 tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and diced
- 2 quarts (8 cups) warm chicken broth
- salt
- pepper

Heat 4 tablespoons of the olive oil in a large soup pot over medium-low heat and add the *pancetta* together with the onion, carrot, and celery. Sauté until the *pancetta* is translucent and the diced vegetables are soft. Add the *farro* and the tomatoes, stir, and add the broth. Cover and bring it to simmer. Cook for 45 minutes, until the *farro* is tender. Remove from the heat and season with the remaining olive oil, salt, and pepper. The soup should be served thick.

## PULSES

Pulses, together with grains, were always especially important in the dietary pattern of Italian populations. Some Roman family names originated from the names of pulses: Cicero from *cicer* (chickpeas), Fabius from *faba* (fava bean). Etruscans and Romans ate them in the form of porridge. In some areas, fava beans and chickpeas are still consumed in this traditional form. In Puglia, Calabria, and Sicily, dried and peeled fava beans are slowly cooked in hot water until they become a purée, seasoned with salt and fresh olive oil. This dish is accompanied in Puglia with boiled wild chicory, while in Sicily, where it is called *maccu*, a potato or some pasta is added to it. On the northwestern coast of Italy, chickpeas are often ground to a sort of flour. In Liguria, *panissa* is made by mixing chickpea flour in water and then slowly bringing the batter to a boil until it acquires the texture of porridge. It is then consumed in three different ways: cold, cut into small pieces, in salads or with some olive oil or lemon juice sprinkled on it; sautéed in a small pan with olive oil and sliced onion; or cut into pieces and fried in olive oil.<sup>6</sup> The latter preparation is very popular in Palermo and western Sicily, where these pieces of fried chickpea porridge are called *panelle* and are often served in *panini* (*pane e panelle*).

On the coast of Liguria and Tuscany, chickpea flour is also mixed into a thin batter with water and olive oil and then spread on large, flat copper pans to be baked in the oven. The result, called *farinata*, is a sort of flat *focaccia*, not thicker than a fifth of an inch, which is usually cut into pieces, seasoned with olive oil, and consumed warm.

Chickpeas and fava, as well as beans and peas, are also consumed whole, often boiled and seasoned with oil, pepper, salt, and other herbs, or with fresh chopped onions in a salad. In Lazio, in spring, fava beans are consumed raw together with pecorino cheese: This is still considered the typical picnic meal for the traditional May Day outing. In some areas, fava beans are braised with small pieces of *lardo* or *pancetta* or *guanciale*. Fava and peas are cooked together with artichokes in a traditional Sicilian ragout called *frittatella*, used to season pasta. On the coast of Tuscany and Liguria chickpeas are prepared as *cacciucco*, with chard, or prepared with salted cry cod (*baccalà*). In Tuscany, beans are stewed *all'uccelletto*, with tomato and sage, or sometimes cooked with water, olive oil, garlic, and sage, inside a glass flask (*fiasco*) laying on the embers inside the hearth. The recipe is thus called "beans in the flask" or *fagioli al fiasco*. In Lazio, beans are often cooked in tomato sauce with the skin of *prosciutto*, called *cotica*. As has been mentioned, pulses are also used for soups (*minestre*), with or without pasta. Pasta with beans (*pasta e fagioli*) and rice with peas (*riso e bisi*) are some of the most common soups based on the pairing of pulses and cereals.<sup>7</sup>

Some pulses are also consumed dried, between 6 and 12 months from the harvest. Before cooking, they have to be soaked in water for a few hours, sometimes with the addition of some baking soda to make them softer. Lentils are peculiar in that they are only used dry. The most famous ones are grown on hills and in volcanic soil, such as the ones from Castelluccio in Umbria, Altamura in Puglia, and the Vesuvius near Naples. Some think it is necessary to soak them before cooking, while others believe that boiling them for a period between 30 to 90 minutes is sufficient. Lentils are usually boiled with onion, garlic, grains of pepper, bay leaves, and other herbs and then cooked either with pasta, and often tomatoes, in a soup or stewed with tomatoes and served as a side dish. Lentils are also cooked with *cotechino* (see the meat section later in this chapter) and tomato for a popular New Year's Eve dish.

Most pulses are now sold already cooked for all kind of dishes. Easy to find in any grocery or supermarkets, they are usually packaged either in tin cans or in glass jars. Peas and fava beans are also available frozen.

Besides the most common ones, it is still possible to find some pulses that were popular in ancient times but have almost disappeared, such as

*cicerchia* (with a taste in between peas and chickpeas, and a particularly tough skin); black-eyed peas, which originated in North Africa and then were almost completely replaced by the beans coming from the Americas; and lupines, are still sold on the street like a snack, boiled and salted.

Chestnuts, although a fruit, were in the past used like pulses, that is to say they were boiled in soups or ground into flour. They played a fundamental role for the poor populations of the Appenine Mountains, who could rely on these fruits to survive in times of scarcity. Due to the low content in gluten, chestnut flour, as well as fava bean or chickpea flour, is not particularly apt to make bread or pasta, but can be made into a thick and nourishing porridge. Chestnut flour is also mixed with sugar, pine nuts and raisins to make *castagnaccio*, a dessert that can be baked or fried, which used to be very popular in Tuscany and Rome. Nowadays, chestnuts have become quite expensive because of their high gathering costs, and they are rarely consumed in these traditional forms. Rather, they are roasted and eaten peeled like a snack, especially in winter.

## POTATOES

Just like chestnuts, potatoes ensured the survival of many populations during hard times and long winters. Introduced in the sixteenth century, they were not widely adopted until the eighteenth century, despite efforts from local authorities and scientists who pointed out the popularity of the tubers in other parts of Europe. During the wars that led to the unification of Italy, the Austrian enemies were often contemptuously labeled as potato eaters, *mangiapatate*. Potatoes can be gathered between April and November. When they are pulled out in spring, they are smaller and softer, with a higher content in water and a thinner skin. They are called new or *novelle*, usually roasted or sautéed without peeling but not very versatile for other purposes. Older potatoes, with less water and a higher starch content, are used in innumerable ways. The ones with a white pulp are particularly apt to be mashed and used in purées, croquettes, and similar dishes. The yellow pulped ones are better for frying, for cooking in pieces, and for salads. Dried and ground, potato flour is particularly useful when making cookies or when it is necessary to lighten any dough too rich in fat and eggs. Many potato-based preparations are similar all over the world. Also in Italy, potatoes can be mashed into a purée with butter and milk, fried, sautéed, boiled for a salad, roasted with grilled meat or fish, baked under wood-fire ashes, and sliced and baked in a terrine with different ingredients such as mushrooms or cheese. Some recipes, on the

other hand, are typically Italian, such as the above-mentioned *tiella di riso*, *cozze e patate*. Potatoes are diced and cooked in a soup with other vegetables to which small-sized pasta is added to make *pasta e patate*. They are mashed and mixed with eggs, small pieces of salami and ham, pepper, and chopped parsley into a mozzarella-filled pie that is cooked in a frying pan; hence the name *frittata di patata* (potato omelet). In Tuscany and Romagna, potatoes mixed with eggs and cheese are used to fill ravioli-shaped fresh pasta, called *tortelli di patate*. Moreover, potatoes are often consumed with other vegetables, such as artichokes or string beans, in warm or cold salads.

Probably the most renowned Italian dish made of potatoes is *gnocchi*, which is easy to find all over the world. The word *gnocchi* refers to any little dumpling made of flour and water (or egg). For instance, *gnocchi alla romana*, which are flat and round shaped, are made with semolina flour and baked in the oven with butter and cheese; the already mentioned *canederli* are made with bread and small pieces of *salumi* or liver. In Tuscany *gnocchi* are made with maize flour, while in Friuli a sweet version of *gnocchi* is made with plums, flour, and potatoes. Even pumpkin pulp is at times used to make small dumplings. Potato *gnocchi* are usually made with white pulped tubers, considered more floury, boiled, passed in a strainer, and kneaded with wheat flour. Some add eggs to make the dough more solid. The dough is then shaped in long, thin rolls that are cut in small pieces and dropped in boiling water till they float again. Sometimes spinach is boiled, wrought out, thinly chopped, and added to the dough to give it a green color and a delicate flavor. Potato *gnocchi* can be seasoned in many ways; the simplest is just pouring melted butter and cheese on them. In some areas of Lombardy, melted butter is mixed with garlic, sage, and grated *parmigiano reggiano* to make the condiment tastier. Elsewhere a light tomato sauce is preferred, while some would rather use a thick meat and tomato sauce. In Liguria basil *pesto* is one of the favorite condiments. Other root vegetables, like beets or radishes, do not have a large diffusion. The only exception is carrots, which are eaten raw in salads, boiled with other vegetables to make soups, braised, or steamed as a side dish.

#### Potato Frittata (*Frittata di Patate*)

- 2 pounds starchy potatoes, such as Yukon Gold
- 1 cup grated *parmigiano reggiano*
- 3 large eggs
- 3 ounces fresh mozzarella, diced

- 3 ounces speck (smoked ham) or *prosciutto crudo* (cured ham), sliced 1/8 inch thick
- 3 ounces salami, sliced 1/8 inch thick
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Boil the potatoes in salted water until tender. Peel and, while still warm, crush them or pass them through a sieve into a large bowl; let cool. Mix in the eggs and the grated Parmigiano Reggiano. Dice the *speck* (or *prosciutto crudo*) and the salami, and add it along with the chopped parsley to the potato mixture. Heat the olive oil in a large, deep nonstick sauté pan, and when the oil is hot, pour in half of the potato mixture to form an even layer. Scatter the diced mozzarella evenly on top and cover with the rest of the potato mixture. Cook until the pie forms a golden crust. Using a large plate or pot lid, flip the *frittata* and cook the second side until golden. Serve hot, cut in slices.

## VEGETABLES

Besides pulses and potatoes, many vegetables have traditionally played a very important role in the Italian dietary patterns, due to frequent lack of meat, which has been too expensive and hard to find in many rural areas. Nevertheless, in the sixteenth century, vegetables began to appear frequently on the tables of the wealthy. Rich, fresh salads have always been served as side dishes, and in summer they often become whole meals, especially when it gets particularly hot. They allow displays of creativity both in the ingredients and in the condiments, usually based on olive oil. Besides, many also opt for salad meals for health or diet reasons. In Italy, despite the growing supermarket and frozen-food culture that makes vegetables available year round, people still have a strong sense of the season in which each of the different vegetables is freshest.<sup>8</sup> Older generations knew very well that, besides being cheaper, vegetables are at their best in their growing season. Younger generations, after a few decades of confusion due to the social and economic changes, are now rediscovering this traditional wisdom, and most quality restaurants are very careful to change their menus according to the season. Nevertheless, many vegetables are pickled and conserved either in olive oil (*verdure sottolio*) or in vinegar (*verdure sottaceto*). These can be easily bought in any grocery shop or supermarket, but many Italians still prefer to make their own vegetables. Some other vegetables, like capers (*capperi*), are cured in salt.

In the past, onions were a very important food for peasants all over the country, often eaten on bread. In time, they have become the main ingredient for the cooking base in many dishes and sauces, called *soffritto*: garlic, onion, and celery, thinly chopped (and sometimes with *lardo* added) and slowly browned in either olive oil or butter. Onions are eaten raw in salads, either chopped or thinly sliced. They can be baked in the oven or stuffed with meat. They can be cut in rings and fried or mixed with eggs in an omelet (*frittata di cipolle*). They are used as the main ingredient for soups or as a side dish. Small, fresh onions (*cipolline*) can be pickled with vinegar and served as snacks with drinks or as a side dish with boiled meat. *Cipolline* can also be braised with butter and stock (*glassate*), sometimes with the addition of sugar and vinegar (*in agrodolce*). Similar to onions, scallions (*scalogno*) were traditionally eaten raw with bread by the peasants in Emilia Romagna. They are now cooked, used as the basis for many dishes (the already-mentioned *soffritto*) instead of onions. *Lampascione*, a slightly bitter vegetable similar to a small onion with a red, hard skin, is found only in the south. They are boiled and seasoned with olive oil and vinegar, baked with olive oil, salt, and pepper, or first boiled and then covered in flour and fried. In Puglia they are also thinly sliced, boiled, and sautéed with tomato sauce and beaten eggs. Leeks, which belong to the same family as onions and garlic, are mostly used to make soups, as in Lombardy where they are cooked with rice and chard and baked in the oven in a gratin, with *béchamel* sauce or cheese.

Garlic, because of its more intense and persistent flavor, is rarely eaten alone, as with the sauce called *agliata* from Liguria, in which it is mashed with olive oil and bread crumbs. Besides being chopped in *soffritto*, garlic is also used in whole cloves, peeled and sautéed in olive oil as a base for many meat, fish, or vegetable dishes. Crushed, it is inserted in small holes pierced in meat before roasting, together with herbs and spices. It is also rubbed on grilled bread to add taste to *bruschetta*.

Although introduced in relatively recent times, other vegetables, such as eggplants, sweet peppers, hot red chili peppers, and tomatoes, play very important roles. Eggplants were actually introduced by the Muslims in Sicily, but it took centuries before they were widely accepted. It seems that the first community to fully adopt them was the Jews, who all along kept closer contact with the Middle East. The very Italian name, *melenzane*, probably derives from the expression *mele insane*, poisonous apples. To this day, their use is mostly limited to the center and the south of the country, although they are also popular along the western coast all the way to the French border. Eggplants deploy all their versatility in south-

ern cuisines. The most common dish is probably *parmigiana*, an eggplant pie that has nothing to do with the city of Parma in Emilia Romagna but gets its name from one of the ingredients, *parmigiano reggiano*. In fact, the dish is likely to have originated in Campania. Slices of eggplant, fried in abundant oil, are laid in layers in a baking pan, with tomato sauce, grated *parmigiano reggiano*, and diced mozzarella in between layers. The pie is then covered with a top layer of tomato sauce and grated *parmigiano* and successively put in the oven till the mozzarella melts and a crust forms on the surface. In other areas, diced, hard-boiled eggs are added, as well as diced *salame* and *prosciutto*. Another pie is the Tuscan *tortino*, in which the eggplants, sliced, covered in flour, and deep fried, are set in a baking pan, covered with beaten eggs and chopped marjoram and parsley, and baked. Stuffed eggplants (*melanzane ripiene*) are also cooked in the oven. The vegetables are cut in half lengthwise, and then the pulp is removed and mixed together with various ingredients, such as olive oil, bread crumbs, milk, garlic, mushrooms, eggs, and grated *parmigiano reggiano*, depending on the area. The hollow halved eggplants are then filled with this stuffing and baked. A very popular Sicilian dish is *caponata*, whose name may derive from *caponna*, the Latin word for tavern. Eggplants and other vegetables (celery and sweet peppers for instance) are diced and deep fried, sautéed in a frying pan with fresh capers, olives, basil, pine nuts, and raisins, and finally savored with vinegar and sugar. The dish is commonly served cold as an appetizer. A similar dish is the Neapolitan *cianfotta*: diced eggplants, tomatoes, potatoes, zucchini, and sweet peppers are sautéed in olive oil with celery and onions. These recipes show a certain similarity to the southern French *ratatouille* and other Middle Eastern dishes, revealing the culinary connections between different areas along the Mediterranean shores. Eggplants can also be simply diced and sautéed, with other ingredients such as chopped parsley and vinegar (*melanzane al funghetto*); they can be sliced, rolled, filled with mozzarella and tomato, and then baked (*involtini di melanzane*); they can be pickled and canned in olive oil. The list is almost endless.

Tomato (*pomodoro*) is another vegetable that has become extremely important, especially in southern Italy, where various methods were created to keep tomatoes in winter. They were sliced and dried under the sun or puréed and boiled in bottles to sterilize them (*passata*). At times, the strained purée was dried in the heat until it became a paste (*concentrato*) that could be added to all kind of dishes for color and flavor. Now tomatoes are available all year long in cans and bottles. They are available peeled (*pelati*) and crushed (*polpa*), as well as in the forms of *passata* and

*concentrato*. Ready-made sauces are sold in cans, and fresh tomatoes are available even in winter, imported or grown in greenhouses.

Besides being used to make sauces for pasta, tomatoes can be sliced in salads, such as the summery *insalata caprese* (slices of tomato and buffalo mozzarella seasoned with olive oil, salt, and basil). Green tomatoes are often used in salads, while riper tomatoes are used for cooking. Tomatoes can also be grilled or filled with rice and baked in the oven. Some varieties are particularly good for sauces, like the famous San Marzano from Campania. In recent years, small cherry tomatoes from Pachino, in southern Sicily, have become the rage, not only in Italy but all over the world. This variety remained quite obscure until foreign markets started demanding it because of its shape and its versatility in salads and on pizzas.

Sweet peppers (*peperoni*) can be consumed fresh, sliced in salads, pickled, sautéed, fried, grilled, or baked. Because of their shape, they are often stuffed. The spicy hot variety (*peperoncino*), both green and red, is added to many dishes, mainly in the south (especially in Abruzzo and Calabria). It is used either fresh or dried, both whole and crushed. It is also soaked in olive oil to make the oil spicy.<sup>9</sup>

Other vegetables from the Americas, such as pumpkins (*zucca*), have a more limited diffusion. They are served as a side dish, baked, or made into a purée, or they are put together with pasta or rice, as in the pumpkin *risotto*. The famous *tortelli di zucca* from Mantova, in Lombardy, are stuffed with pumpkin, crushed *amaretto* cookies, and mustard-flavored candied fruit (*mostarda*).<sup>10</sup> In Sicily, pumpkins are diced, fried, and then sautéed with sugar and vinegar. A close relative of the pumpkin is the cucumber (*cetriolo*), originating from East Asia. In Italy cucumbers are mostly used fresh, sliced in salads. Zucchini are largely consumed all over the country, especially in summer when they are in season, due to their delicate taste and their low caloric content. They can be fried, braised as a seasoning for pasta, baked (in this case they are halved, emptied of their content and stuffed with various ingredients, often meat), grilled with a sprinkle of olive oil, or just diced and sautéed with fresh herbs.

Asparagus (*asparagi*) is very popular, both in its cultivated and wild varieties. In spring, when it is in season, it is possible to find thin, dark green, very tasty wild asparagus in fields, which is best in omelets or for *risotto*. Asparagus must be prepared carefully, first peeling the stems, then tying them together and placing them standing in boiling water, leaving the tips out of the water for a couple of inches so that they get steamed and they do not directly touch the boiling water. Once ready, they can be baked au gratin, served with melted butter and fried eggs in the *asparagi*.

*alla Milanese*, or stewed in tomato sauce with other vegetables, such as peas and artichokes. Other wild field greens are actually still used for cooking, such as nettle (*ortiche*), wild fennel, watercress, and Roman chicory (*puntarelle*), which in Rome are cut in four along the length, soaked in water till they curl, and seasoned with a sauce made of oil, vinegar, anchovies, and garlic.

Artichokes (in Italian, *carciofi*), with their characteristic iron taste that makes them quite difficult to pair with wine, also require special preparation. After cutting the tip, the external and harder leaves are discarded, and the fluffy material at their core is eliminated. Once cleaned, artichokes must be soaked in water and lemon, to avoid a change of color, and then dried before cooking. Innumerable preparations list artichokes as the main ingredient. Besides being eaten raw, or sliced in salads, they are cut in eighths, battered or floured, and then deep fried. In Sicily, they are stuffed with sausage, grated *parmigiano reggiano*, eggs, pine nuts, and raisins, and then covered in beaten eggs, fried, and successively braised in a tomato sauce. In Rome, two recipes are particularly popular. One, called *alla giudia* ("the Jewish way"), is a traditional Jewish dish: Artichokes are deep fried in abundant olive oil, but pressure is applied on them so that they open up against the bottom of the frying pan, allowing every leaf to become crunchy. The other recipe is called *alla romana* ("the Roman way"): Artichokes are quickly sautéed and then stuffed with chopped garlic, parsley, and marjoram, laid upside-down in a baking pan, and covered for half their height with water and olive oil. They are then cooked in the oven till soft. A close relative to the artichoke is cardoon (*cardo*), a harder, thorny white plant the only edible part of which are the ribs, which require a long cooking time to become soft.

Fennel (*finocchio*), a typical Mediterranean vegetable, can be boiled, braised, or baked au gratin. It is also often eaten raw, in salads or by itself, usually dipped in the condiment called *pinzimonio* or *cazzimperio*, made of olive oil, salt, and pepper, mostly as an appetizer. This simple condiment is used with many other fresh vegetables, such as sweet peppers, endives or celery. The latter is also added to salads, and it often becomes an ingredient for *soffritto* and soups. It is more rarely boiled or braised.

Leaf vegetables can be divided between those that are consumed raw in salads, and those that need cooking (although some of them are used raw at times). In the first category we find lettuce, escarole, cress, the increasingly popular arugula, and *radicchio*, a particular type of chicory, the most valued varieties of which are grown in Veneto, in the towns of Treviso and Chioggia. *Radicchio* is also often cooked, either grilled and seasoned with

olive oil and salt, or used for more complex preparations, such as *risotto* with *radicchio*. The most common leaf vegetables that need cooking are chard (*bieta*), spinach (*spinaci*), wild chicory (*cicoria*), cabbage (*cavolo*), cauliflower (*cavolfiori*), broccoli, and broccoli rabe (*broccoletti*). They can be added to soups, boiled and seasoned with olive oil, or sautéed in the frying pan with olive oil, garlic, and other herbs. Spinach, boiled and minced, is also added to pasta dough to give it a green color, or mixed with fresh ricotta cheese to make a very popular stuffing for *ravioli*. Vegetables with harder leaves, such as cabbage, are also stewed or braised. Boiled and sautéed broccoli rabe, very typical in Puglia, is a classic accompaniment for *orecchiette* pasta.

### Eggplant Relish (*Caponata*)

- 2 cups extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 1 medium red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and diced into 1/4-inch pieces
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 3 large stalks celery, diced into 1/4-inch pieces
- 1/4 cup black olives, pitted and chopped
- 2 tablespoons small capers, drained and rinsed
- 1/3 cup red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/2 tablespoon crushed red chili pepper (optional)
- salt

Heat a half cup of the olive oil in a large sauté pan. Add the onions and sauté until translucent. Add the bell pepper and a pinch of salt, and cover the pan. Stir occasionally until the peppers begin to soften. Add the oregano. Remove from the heat and set aside.

In another pan, pour another half cup of olive oil, add the diced celery and sauté until it starts to soften. Drain from the oil and set aside. Discard the oil. Pour the remaining cup of olive oil into the pan. When it is hot, add the diced eggplants and cook, stirring frequently, until golden brown. Remove from the oil and place on paper towel to drain.

Add the celery and the eggplants to the pan with the pepper mixture. Place the pan on medium-low heat, cover, and simmer, stirring occasionally, for about 15 minutes, until the different flavors blend. Be careful not to overcook the vegetables.

Before removing from the heat, add the capers, the chopped olives, the vinegar, and the sugar, and stir for a couple of minutes. Adjust the seasoning. For a

spicy relish, add the crushed red chili pepper. Serve at room temperature. You can keep the relish refrigerated in an airtight container for 4 or 5 days. Serve as an appetizer, with crackers or leaves of fresh endive.

### MUSHROOMS AND TRUFFLES

Mushrooms (*funghi*) and their close underground relatives, truffles (*tartufi*), have been appreciated in Italy since Roman times. The emperor Claudius loved *ovoli* mushrooms so much that its scientific name (*amanita caesarea*) derives from him. *Ovoli* mushrooms are still the most expensive: They are very rare, mostly consumed thinly sliced with a little olive oil. In some areas they are accompanied with slivered *parmigiano reggiano*, or with an anchovy-based sauce. Second only to *ovoli*, *porcini* mushrooms enjoy vast appreciation all over Italy. Both species can only be gathered, which makes them particularly expensive. Other species, such as white champignons and the so-called portobello—the same ones that are usually found in U.S. grocery shops—are commonly grown, but they lack the flavor intensity of wild mushrooms. Of course, it is dangerous to consume gathered wild mushrooms without having them checked by some experts or by the local health offices. Some species are highly poisonous, and they are similar enough to the edible species to constitute a real threat. Among the most common edible species, we can mention chanterelle (*galletti* or *singerli*), honey mushrooms (*chiodini*), oyster mushrooms (*gelone*), and morels (*spugnole* or *morchelle*). Mushrooms can be dried (usually sliced), pickled, and canned in olive oil, vinegar, or salted water, or consumed fresh. Dried *porcini* mushrooms, with their particularly intense flavor, need to be soaked in warm water before use, often in sauces or to make *risotto*. Fresh mushrooms can be grilled (usually the larger and meatier ones), sautéed in a frying pan with a little olive oil, garlic, and fresh parsley (*trifolati*), or also battered and deep fried.

Truffles, which are gathered wild with the help of specially trained dogs or sows, are probably among the most expensive foods in Italy. White truffles, particularly rare, are found near Alba, in Piedmont, and in smaller quantities in Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, and Umbria; they are best when consumed raw, thinly sliced over egg with butter, pasta, *risotto*, or meats. On the other hand, black truffles, which are less rare and usually found in Umbria and Tuscany, can be cooked. In Umbria, they are traditionally grated in warm olive oil and garlic to season fresh pasta; elsewhere, they are sliced and placed under the skin of roasted poultry, especially capon and pheasant, or ground and mixed in pâtés or terrines. Cheaper truffles,

such as the white *bianchetto* and the black *scorzone* or summer truffle, have a much less deep flavor and are often sold at exorbitant prices to non-experts.

### HERBS AND SPICES

Despite the craze for spices in the Middle Ages and in the early Renaissance, these exotic ingredients no longer play a very important role in Italian cuisine, with the exception of pepper (*pepe*), both black and white. This has become a very common ingredient, and it is often ground fresh on many dishes and salads. Saffron, which gives a nice golden hue and a unique flavor to dishes like *risotto alla Milanese* and fish soups, is grown in Abruzzo, in the province of Aquila. The production is limited and extremely expensive. As a consequence, shops sell the somewhat cheaper saffron from Spain or the ersatz spice curcuma, from the Middle East.

The only areas where spices are still widely used in the kitchen are Lombardy and Emilia in the northeast, probably under the influence of Venice, which for centuries was a key trade center for spices. Later, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which dominated the area, introduced dishes and habits from central and eastern Europe. In these areas, nutmeg (*noce moscata*) is often added to meat fillings in stuffed pasta and sometimes gives its flavor to braised meat; cloves (*chiodi di garofano*), paprika (*paprica*), and cumin (*cumino*) appear both in savory and sweet dishes. Cinnamon (*cannella*) is used all over the country, mostly for pastry.

Herbs, on the other hand, enjoy a much wider use. While in the past higher classes tended to prefer spices to herbs, which were considered less refined and fashionable, in the seventeenth century the use of herbs expanded from the kitchens of the poor and the bourgeois to rich tables. Herbs are still widely used in *haute cuisine*, especially by creative chefs who are finding interesting and stimulating ways to mix local traditions with the flavors of more exotic ingredients. Some chefs, experimenting in fusion cuisine, at times try to make their cuisine more original and interesting by an inordinate use of foreign spices in their dishes.

Basil (*basilico*) is one of the more versatile herbs in Italian cuisine. It is used fresh in salads, added to more elaborated dishes, or just chopped together with *parmigiano reggiano*, *pecorino* cheese, garlic, pine nuts, and olive oil to make the famous *pesto*, an extremely popular condiment for pasta originally from Liguria, probably the most renowned area for basil. Other typical Mediterranean herbs are oregano (*origano*), particularly in

the south, and rosemary (*rosmarino*), the latter often used in soups and to flavor roast meat. Bay leaves (*alloro*) and juniper berries (*ginepro*) are also used with roast meat. Parsley (*prezzemolo*) is mostly used chopped and sprinkled fresh on dishes, while salvia is particularly tasty with melted butter to season stuffed pasta or fish. Thyme (*timo*) and myrtle (*mirtto*) are not very common, with the exception of Sardinia, where these herbs grow in greater quantities (myrtle is also used to make liquors). On the other hand, herbs like dill (*aneto*) and tarragon (*dragoncello*) are almost considered foreign and their use is quite limited.

### FRUITS AND NUTS

Together with herbs, fruits and nuts of all kinds are grown all over Italy. Although now all kinds of fruit are available year round, most consumers are still very keen on buying only what is in season, not only because it is less expensive to buy then, but above all because the produce is at its best, even if at times it does not look that great. Imperfect-looking seasonal fruit is often much tastier than the beautiful, shiny, impeccable fruit that many outdoor markets and supermarkets offer. In the past decades, many tropical fruits have made their ways to the Italian table, such as bananas, pineapples, grapefruit, and coconuts. In recent years, also mangoes, papayas, and avocados have become more usual. Kiwi, originally from New Zealand, is now widely grown all over the country, to the point that Italy has become one of the most important producers in the world. The most common fruits are oranges, tangerines, pears, and apples in winter; strawberries and cherries in spring; peaches, plums, medlars, apricots, figs, melons, and watermelons in summer; persimmons, grapes and chestnuts in the fall. Fruits play a very important role in the Italian diet. A bowl full of fruit is often on the table all day long for quick snacks. Fresh fruit is consumed regularly at the end of every meal, before, after, or instead of dessert; fruit is more rarely eaten for breakfast. It also can be used as an appetizer; in summer, figs and melons are served together with cured raw ham (*prosciutto crudo*). Fruit is also cooked as dessert, diced and sliced into fruit salads, or used as an ingredient for savory recipes. For instance, it is not unusual to find cooked plums or apples as accompaniment for a pork roast.

Fruit is also dried and consumed during the winter, especially plums, figs, dates, and apricots. Some fruit is candied and used in pastry making. The most traditional are orange and citron, together with pumpkin, although now candied exotic fruit like papaya and guava are not rare.

Raisins are also very common; the most common varieties produced in Italy are the small and golden *sultanina* and the bigger and darker *Malaga*. Other varieties are imported from the Middle East.

Although they can be used fresh, nuts are mostly consumed dried or toasted. Walnuts, pine nuts, hazelnuts, almonds, pistachios, and peanuts can be bought as snacks, usually with added sugar or salt, or mostly as ingredients for all kind of desserts. In northern Italy, they are mixed with raisins and apples and wrapped in sweet dough to make *strudel*. In Tuscany, whole almonds are added to small cookies called *cantucci*, often dipped in sweet dessert wines. In central Italy, whole hazelnuts are kneaded with flour, honey, pepper, and other ingredients to make *pan pepato* (pepper bread). In Rome, a typical Christmas dish is *pan giallo* (yellow bread), made of flour, cocoa, raisins, dates, almonds, walnuts, and hazelnuts.

Almonds constitute a fundamental ingredient in pastry traditions. They can be used to make cookies like *amaretto* and specialties such as *panforte* from Siena, a sort of fruitcake with candied fruit and honey. Grounded and mixed with maize flour, almonds are one of the main elements of the *torta sbrisolona* from Mantova, a hard, flat, thin cake that cannot be cut but only broken in pieces. *Torrone* is a kind of nougat with toasted almonds (sometimes substituted by hazelnuts), honey, and sugar; it comes in different kinds: hard, soft, and chocolate covered. In Abruzzo, almonds are crushed in small pieces and mixed with egg whites and sugar to make hard cookies called *spumantini*. In Tuscany, thin diamond-shaped soft cookies made of almond dough are called *ricciarelli*. In many areas of the south, almonds are ground to a fine paste and, with the addition of sugar, made into marzipan (*marzapane*), which is used in many desserts. In Sicily, marzipan is often called *martorana*, from the name of a convent in Palermo famous in the past for its production, and it is actually shaped and painted with edible colors to look like peaches, apples, or figs. For Easter, marzipan is shaped like a lamb and given to the children as a symbol of the holiday.

### OLIVES AND OLIVE OIL

Olives are a particular kind of fruit. Olive trees are traditionally part of the landscapes of many areas of Italy, from north to south. Sun and wind are very important elements for their growth. The light favors the formations of the nutrients and the flavor elements that characterize the fruits; and breezes facilitate the pollination of the hermaphrodite flowers and



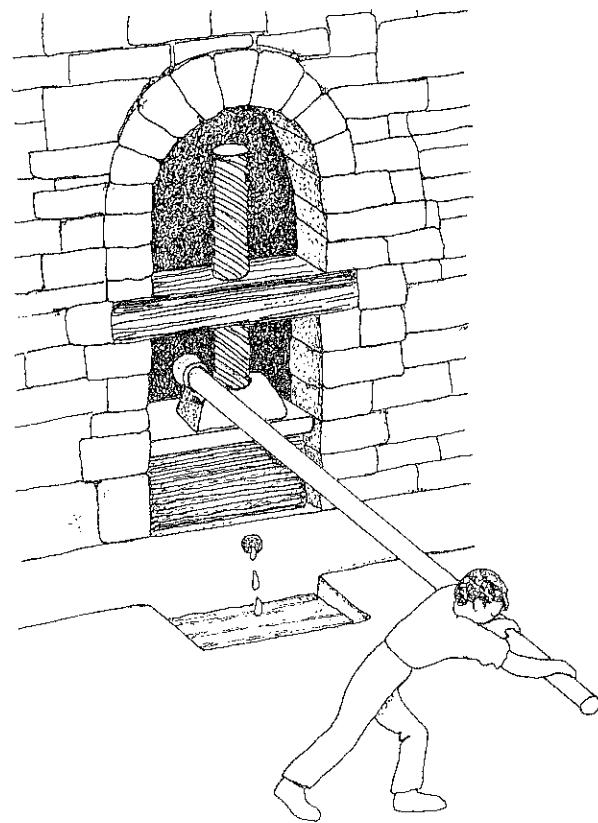
Olives.

hence guarantee production output. Since ancient times, numerous varieties of olives (usually called *cultivar*) have appeared in Italy. Today there are more or less 500 varieties, with 50 being the most common.

In northern Italy, olive trees are found around lake Garda, the northernmost growing area for the olive. Further south, we find olives in Liguria, on the hills northwest of Venice, in Cividale del Friuli, and in Brisighella in Emilia Romagna. Central Italy is one of the main growing territories; oils from Tuscany, Umbria, and the Sabina area in Lazio are especially appreciated. Olive trees can also grow in relatively arid soils, if sufficient watering is provided, and that makes them particularly apt to thrive in the south. The most renowned production areas in the south are Campania, where the Greeks first planted olive trees, and Puglia, with a quite impressive output especially from the dry plains. Good crops can also be found in the southern and western parts of Sicily and in Sardinia (near the cities of Cagliari in the south and Alghero in the north of the island).

To guarantee high quality, olives must be whole and intact, not frozen or affected by any pest, insect, or mold. Especially in the south, when olive trees are vast and tall, farmers place nets under the branches and wait for the fruits to fall when they are ripe, or else beat the branches with long sticks to make the fruits fall. These methods, though, very often tend to bruise the olives, with the result that oils are more acid because the microscopic cavities containing oil in the pulp cells are broken. Gathering by hand (*brucatura a mano*), although slow and very expensive, is the best method to ensure the fruits are not spoiled. Moreover, once gathered, the olives must be brought to the mill (*frantoio*) and processed as soon as possible. In most areas the harvest takes place between November and December, cold months that favor a good extraction. Only in the south are olives gathered in spring.

There are two main milling systems: the traditional method with its three separate steps—grinding, pressing, and separating—and the continuous cycle, in which all the phases are unified. The traditional method starts by crushing the olives with massive circular stones (*macine*) and mashing them into a paste with the addition of water to lower the temperature. The paste, made by oily, watery, and solid components (the latter are called *sansa*) is then kept for 15 to 60 minutes in a state of slow movement (*gramolazione*) that facilitates the aggregation of oil in larger drops, which is easier to extract. The paste is successively spread on large disks called *fiscoli* (traditionally made of woven hemp, now plastic or stainless steel), piled on top of each other and squeezed under a hydraulic press. In this phase the solid part or *sansa* is removed from the oily and watery mixture (*olio mosto*), which is then either centrifuged to separate the



Traditional olive press.

oil from the water or treated with a process called *sinolea*. In this case, *olio mosto* is passed through multiple stainless steel blades to which oil drops stick, allowing the extraction. Before bottling, oil needs to be filtered to remove dregs and sediments, usually sieved through cotton, although some producers skip this step in order to obtain a more opaque, rustic product, which nevertheless has a shorter shelf life.

In the continuous cycle method, on the other hand, olives enter the machinery at one end, and oil comes out at the other. Metal hammers crush the olives, which are then kneaded and passed into a decanter that extracts the oil by centrifugation. This method ensures a better handling of olives, a higher level of hygiene, and less contact with water, which avoids oxidation. Nevertheless, since the crushing by stone wheels usually ensures better-tasting oil, many producers have adopted a combined method, mixing traditional-style grinding and modern systems.

Each variety of olive, or *cultivar*, differs in size, taste, and growing periods, making the oils deriving from them different. Mixture of olive varieties (*olivaggio*) and *terroir* (depending on character of the soil, weather, exposure to the sun and wind, and cultivation methods) determine the character of the final product. Only in recent years has the profession of olive oil taster been publicly recognized, and also more refined consumers are now aware of the impact of elements such as growing areas, *cultivar*, and harvesting times. Small productions, difficult to purchase and quite expensive, enjoy growing success. Nevertheless, for everyday use, most consumers still buy mass-produced olive oils, displaying a sensitivity to prices as well as quality.

Oils are classified according to extraction methods, taste, and content in oleic acid. Extra-virgin olive oil must have an acidity lower than 0.8 percent, with an absolutely perfect taste; if the acidity is between 1 percent and 2 percent, but the taste is still good, then the oil is called virgin. It is simply labeled as olive oil when virgin oil also contains some chemically refined oil and its acidity is lower than 1 percent. *Olio di sansa d'oliva*, on the other hand, is obtained by extracting oil chemically from the *sansa* and mixing it with virgin olive oil, with a final acidity not higher than 1 percent. To be called refined, *olio di sansa d'oliva* must present an acidity lower than 0.3 percent.

Despite widespread prejudice, olive oil is very good for frying, because it is more stable than other oils at high temperatures. Of course, oil must be changed often, because if it is exposed to high heat for too long it develops peroxides that can be toxic. Besides, fried food should be consumed immediately, as soon as it is drained from the oil, before it undergoes ox-

dation. It is also a good rule never to warm up previously fried food. It is advisable to choose olive oils with a light taste, so that their aroma does not cover the food flavor. Despite the relevance of olive oil in the Italian diet, other vegetable oils are used for cooking and frying. The most common are those made from peanuts (*arachidi*), corn (*mais*), sunflower (*girasole*), and the so-called mixed seeds (*semi vari*). Lard was also formerly used for frying, but health concerns have now basically banned it from kitchens.

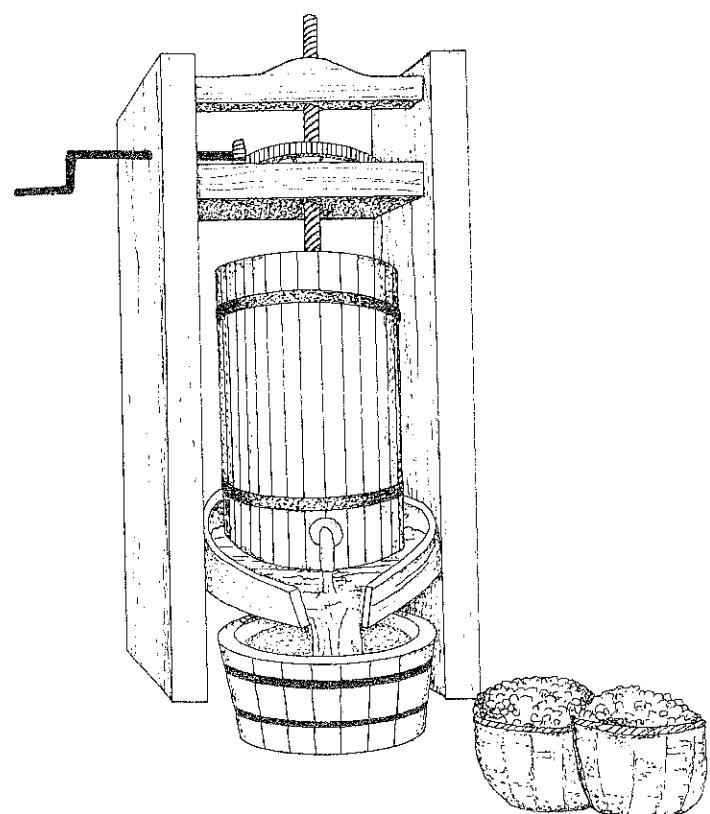
Food can be fried by itself, like potatoes, or covered with various elements: egg, bread crumbs, or batter, for example. Dollops of flour and water-based batters, enriched with different ingredients, can be dropped into frying oil to make all kinds of so-called *frittelle*. *Misto fritto* (mixed fried food) can be found on restaurant menus all over Italy. In Rome, for instance, many pizza places serve fried food as an appetizer, usually battered cod, rice *supplì* (rice balls seasoned with tomato sauce and diced mozzarella), potato croquettes, and zucchini flowers filled with mozzarella cheese and anchovies. Fried fish is also extremely popular all along the coast, especially in summer. Small fish, squid, and shrimp are usually just covered in egg or bread crumbs and fried. All over the country, meat (lamb chops and pieces of chicken and rabbit) and all kinds of vegetables are consumed fried.

Besides being used to make oil, olives are commonly pickled and cured: 35 percent of all Italian varieties are grown only for the table, with Sicily and Puglia having the largest production. These olives are either black or green. They are processed with various methods in order to free them of any bitter taste and make them last longer. Olives are commonly served as appetizers, as side dishes, as salads, and also as ingredients in many dishes. A flavorful way of serving black olives, for instance, is with diced blood oranges, olive oil, and oregano. In the town of Ascoli, in the Marche region, big green olives are pitted, stuffed with meat, covered in bread crumbs, and fried.

#### WINE AND VINEGAR

Vines have always been an important element in the landscape of many areas. Wine is a basic component in everyday meals. Nobody would renounce it; consumers would rather limit themselves to lesser-quality products.

The long tradition of vine growing means there are hundreds and hundreds of local varieties of grapes, called *vitigni autoctoni*, many of which



Wine press.

risked disappearing in the past.<sup>11</sup> Nowadays the production is limited to *vitis vinifera* grapes, while fermented drinks from other grapes such as *vitis fragolina* cannot be called wine. The *phylloxera* disease that heavily hit all of Europe, and Italy at the end of the nineteenth century, almost destroyed wine production and local grapes. It was necessary to import plants from the Americas, which were resistant to the disease, and graft the indigenous varieties on them to ensure the survival of the European wine industry. After decades of oblivion, some producers rediscovered many local grapes and applied new wine-making methods to them, achieving standards of quality that have positively influenced the Italian market at all levels. It is more difficult to export these wines abroad, because their unfamiliar names and the sheer variety of these grapes intimidate many foreign consumers, used to Merlots or Chardonnays. Nev-

ertheless, these products are gaining more and more exposure, conquering an audience ranging from connoisseurs to amateurs.<sup>12</sup>

The three northeastern regions—Veneto, Trentino-Alto Adige, and Friuli—play an important role in the Italian wine market. More than one-third of the DOCs are produced in this area, even if it accounts for less than a sixth of the nation's total production. One of the most important wine fairs in the world, Vinitaly, is held every year in Verona, Veneto, while two very renowned oenology schools are located in Conegliano, in Veneto, and in San Michele all'Adige, in Trentino. Famous wines from this area are Tocai, Prosecco, Verduzzo, Refosco and Raboso, Teroldego, Recioto, Amarone, Lagrein, Marzemino, and Collio.

Piedmont is traditionally one of the most famous regions for red wines such as Barolo and Barbaresco—made from the local grape Nebbiolo—Barbera, and Dolcetto; among white grapes, Moscato, Arneis, and Cortese are particularly interesting. Oltrepò Pavese near the town of Pavia, the Valtellina Valley not far from Switzerland, and Franciacorta around Brescia constitute the main wine areas in Lombardy, with Franciacorta producing internationally renowned sparkling wines based on Merlot, Cabernet, Pinot Noir, or Chardonnay grapes.

Going further south, Emilia-Romagna is one of regions with the widest extension of plains in Italy. Lambrusco, often used to make sparkling red wines, is the typical grape variety in the northern part of the area, while in the southern part the white Albana and the red Sangiovese are dominant.

Two native varieties stand out along the Adriatic coast, the white Verdicchio in the Marche region and red Montepulciano, which originated in the Abruzzo and is now extensively planted also in other areas. In the Marche we can also find such fine reds as the Marches' Rosso Piceno and Rosso Conero.

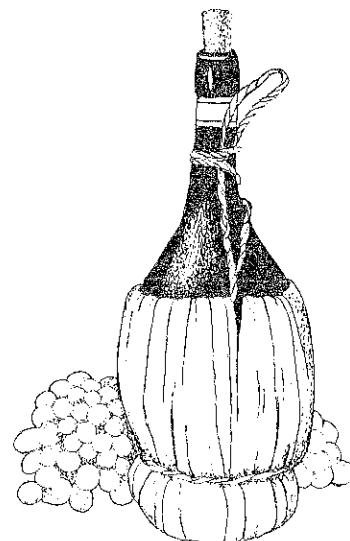
The core of Sangiovese growing territory is Tuscany, where it prevails in Chianti—the nation's archetypal wine—as well as in Brunello di Montalcino, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, and many other reds. Among the other red Tuscan wines, we can mention Morellino di Scansano, while for the whites, Vernaccia di San Gimignano is surely the most famous. In Umbria, besides the popular whites Grechetto and, above all, Orvieto, mostly made of Trebbiano, the reds Sagrantino di Montefalco and Torrano have gained a deserved fame. White Malvasia reigns in Rome's region, especially in Frascati and the wines of the surrounding hills, also combined with the ubiquitous Trebbiano in Est Est Est wine.

In Campania varieties dating back to the Roman times, such as the white Greco di Tufo, Falanghina, and Fiano d'Avellino, have undergone

a process of modernization that put them back on the map, with a vengeance. The red Aglianico, also grown in the neighboring Puglia and Basilicata, is producing great results.

Puglia and Sicily vie for leadership in volume produced, much of it in the blending wines shipped to northern places or in bulk wines distilled into industrial alcohol. Yet producers in these regions have become increasingly aware that the future lies in quality, as the volume steadily decreases. A wide variety of reds dominate Puglia and provide a delight to the wine lover's palate: Salice Salentino, Copertino, Squinzano, Aglianico, and Carignano. Sicily boasts famous wines such as Marsala, Moscato di Pantelleria, and Malvasia di Lipari. Besides these, many estates are working on white Inzolia and red Nero d'Avola to create high-quality wines. Calabria, a mostly mountainous region, produces interesting Cirò reds, whites, and rosés. On the other big Italian island, Sardinia, only a few wines have reached national fame: the whites Vernaccia di Oristano, Vermentino di Sardegna, and the red Cannonau grape.

Italian wine covers large portions of the world market, with France, Argentina, Chile, and Australia as the main competitors. This is a new phenomenon, after many years of low-quality production almost entirely absorbed by local consumption. After World War II, rural reform marked the virtual death of the huge underdeveloped estates that—especially in



Vino.

the south—had been a common form of ownership. Sharecropping was abandoned, and many farmers were able to decide about their own production. Italy, especially its southern regions, had become famous for dark bulk wines with high alcohol levels that were often used for blends with other wines. In 1956 the winter was particularly fierce, freezing vineyards in many wine-producing areas. At the same time, massive internal migration to the industrial cities resulted in a lack of labor. Landowners responded by adopting modern techniques and mechanical tools. As a consequence, in the 1960s and 1970s wine cultivation went from mixed cultures with vines planted together with other trees or vegetables to specialized vineyards, but at the same time producers became more concerned about the output quantity than anything else.

In the same years, following the French example, a classification system was adopted in other European countries, including Italy, which in 1963 introduced the DOC regulations. However, the first DOC zone, Vernaccia di San Gimignano in Tuscany, was only declared in 1966. Rules were established to determine who had the power to create new DOCs and how. Production regulations (called *disciplinare*) delimit the zones in which the wines originate and specify type (or types, since a denomination may include a range of versions), color, grape varieties, minimum alcohol levels, maximum yields in grapes per hectare and wine from grapes, basic sensory characteristics, fermentation (in wood or otherwise and possibly in sealed tanks), required minimum aging periods, and special designations identifying particular subzones, such as *classico* or *superiore*. The same 1963 law created the DOCG (Denomination of Controlled and Guaranteed Origin, or in Italian *Denominazione d'Origine Controllata e Garantita*). The first DOCG, Brunello di Montalcino in Tuscany, was actually established in 1980. A DOCG wine must meet standards that are stricter than those stipulated in DOC regulations. One of the main differences is the lower yields imposed by the DOCG rules. The limitations in output have probably done more to boost the quality of the wines than any other provision in the regulations, which also require in-depth chemical analyses for all DOCG wines. To this day, there are only 27 of them: Asti Spumante-Moscato d'Asti, Barbaresco, Barolo, Brachetto d'Aqui, Gattinara, Gavi, Ghemme in Piedmont; Franciacorta sparkling wine, Valtellina Sfurzat, and Valtellina superiore in Lombardy; Bardolino, Recioto di Soave, Soave Superiore in Veneto; Ramandolo in Friuli; Albana di Romagna, Brunello di Montalcino, Carmignano, Vernaccia di San Gimignano, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, Chianti and Chianti Classico in Tuscany; Vernaccia di Serrapetrona in Marche; Sagrantino di

Montefalco and Torgiano Rosso Riserva in Umbria; Montepulciano d'Abruzzo in Abruzzo; Fiano d'Avellino, Greco di Tufo, Taurasi in Campania; and Vermentino di Gallura in Sardinia.

Very soon, nevertheless, producers felt that this definition was at times both too restrictive and too inclusive. As a consequence, a new category was created in 1992, in compliance with the European Union regulations: the IGT (Typical Geographic Indication, or in Italian, *Indicazione Geografica Tipica*). The IGT regulations require use of authorized varieties, most of them establishing the use of one type only or in a ratio of at least 85 percent to other approved grapes. The IGT wines are identified with specific territories, most of which are larger than the zones specified in the regulations for DOCGs and DOCs. Some are region-wide, as in the case of Toscano in Tuscany and Sicilia in Sicily, while others are limited to a valley or a range of hills. For consumers, the IGT denomination primarily indicates a wide range of wines of acceptable quality available at highly competitive prices. It also allowed many local wines to acquire a higher status than the regular Table Wine (Vdt or *Vino da tavola*), that can come from anywhere in Italy and can be bottled anywhere or even sold in bulk (*sfuso*). Italy is still one of the most important producers of bulk wine in the world.

Just as the government started implementing the new classifications, some innovative wine producers, who were particularly interested in experimenting, found the DOC regulations too restrictive. Back in 1968, in Tuscany, Count Incisa della Rocchetta, with the help of the oenologist Giacomo Tachis, created Sassicaia, still considered by many one of the best Italian wines. In 1971, again in Tuscany, Antinori started producing Tignanello. These producers substituted the white grapes that at the time were part of the DOC Chianti wines and introduced new varieties in the blend, such as Cabernet. Though officially classified as *Vini da tavola* since the beginning, these wines, known in the United States as Supertuscans, boasted an extremely high quality, which allowed them to be sold at high prices. In time, together with others such as Ornellaia or Guado al Tasso, they were able to compete with the great Bordeaux on the international market.

Italy was ready for a huge leap in quality. Many producers decided to change their production methods, renouncing large outputs to achieve a better quality: fewer plants per acre, intense pruning, and hiring oenologists with international experience. One of the first experts that tried to explain these changes to the general public, making wine popular and more accessible, was Luigi Veronelli, who in 1976 published the monumental *Catalogo Bolaffi dei Vini d'Italia*, the first serious guide to Italian wines.

While the innovative trends in wine production were receiving recognition, Italy was struck by a scandal that had deep consequences for many years. Methanol, a poisonous substance, was found in some wines from the regions of Lombardy, Liguria, and Piedmont, killing 14 people and causing intoxication and a few cases of blindness. Some producers had used methanol to cut wine in order to raise the alcohol content of their products. Although the Italian government issued many emergency regulations, the general perception about wine was profoundly tainted. Consumption fell to a historical low, while many Italians adopted, at least for a while, beer. On the international market Italian wines were considered with growing suspicion. The economic damage was incalculable.

It was only in the 1990s that wine reached a new popularity. Young people, who had for many years been attracted to soft drinks and, above all, beer, began drinking wine. It is now common for many Italians to buy good bottles on special occasions, and a few enthusiasts have nice collections, often stored in special cellars. Most families still have a bottle of wine on their table for every meal but breakfast, even if in some areas of the northeast, in winter, it is not unusual to see older people drinking wine in the morning. Wine is still bought in bulk for everyday consumption, but the general appreciation for high-quality wines is growing. At a restaurant, or when inviting friends over, hosts are careful when choosing wines to offer with every course. For this reason, wine-tasting classes and courses for professional sommeliers are now extremely popular.

Nevertheless, not all the wine is consumed as such. Some of it is traditionally fermented into vinegar, one of the most common condiments in Italian cuisine since ancient times. Although sometimes it is still produced at home, adding some vinegar or some "mother of vinegar" (*madre dell'aceto*, a colony of bacteria taken from another vinegar maker) to red or white wine, nowadays vinegar is mostly industrially produced and bought ready-made. Vinegar is used to season salads, to cook, and to cure vegetables. A special kind of vinegar, exclusively produced in the area of Modena in Emilia, is balsamic vinegar (*aceto balsamico*). Although many ersatz versions of it are now available all over the world, and sprinkling some of it on any dish seems to have become a fad, the real traditional balsamic vinegar is difficult to find, and extremely expensive. Grape must is cooked and allowed to slowly ferment in order to let it naturally turn into vinegar. The vinegar is then poured into small wood barrels, successively moved to increasingly smaller ones as the vinegar evaporates. Each barrel is made of a different kind of wood (oak, chestnut, and cherry, among others) so that the vinegar acquires different aromas in a process that lasts at

least five years. The final result is a thick syrup, both sharp and sweet, which is perfect both on a salad and on ice cream or strawberries.

### SPIRITS AND BEER

Italian spirits are traditionally made either by the distillation of the by-products deriving from the wine-making process or by macerating herbs and fruit in different types of alcohol. The most famous distilled spirit is *grappa*, obtained from pomace of grapes previously crushed for wine. Mostly produced in the northern regions of the country, it is usually clear but sometimes it shows amber hues because of the aging process in wood. Grape skins, drenched in must and freed from seeds to obtain the best products, are poured in an alembic placed on a heat source. The vapors are cooled into a liquid that is rich in alcohol (86 percent) and aromatic substances, which is often mixed with distilled water to lower its alcohol content. Usually the liquid obtained at the beginning and at the end of the process (called head, *testa*, and tail, *coda*) is discarded, and only the heart (*cuore*) is successively bottled or aged in small wood barrels. In the past, *grappa* was often considered a plebeian drink for mountain people. Only in the past couple of decades has this spirit enjoyed growing success, which in turn pushed the producers to improve the quality. It is now possible to buy *grappa* obtained from a single kind of grape (*monovitigno*) or from blends of different grapes (*polivitigno*). Some producers flavor their *grappa* with fruit or herbs, a practice often scorned by purists. A less popular but related spirit is grape aqua vitae (*acquavite d'uva*) distilled not from skins, but directly from the wine must.

A whole category of spirits that enjoys widespread favor is called *amaro* (bitter) or *digestivo* (digestive), usually obtained by the maceration of herbs in alcohol and water. As the name suggests, these products have a low sugar content and a very peculiar, bitter flavor, which make them difficult to export abroad. Mostly consumed at the end of meals, *amaro* is often mentioned as a typical example of acquired taste. Other spirits obtained from the maceration of *sambuca* (elder) or *anisetta* (anise) are also consumed mostly within the country. On the other end, sweet liquor like *limoncello*, obtained through the maceration of lemon grinds in alcohol and sugar, is reaping the benefits of a growing popularity in Italy and abroad, also promoted by effective marketing campaigns.

The modern history of industrially produced beer dates back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Consumption grew drastically in the second half of the century, when new techniques for refrigeration were de-

veloped. The first meeting of Italian beer producers took place in 1872, with around 150 companies. With the new century, the number of producers shrunk, while the output increased enormously with the rise of fascism and World War II. The industry, which is particularly strong in the sector of low-fermentation lagers, grew again starting from the 1950s, introducing big bottles that made beer available also for family use. Consumption is growing steadily, especially among young people who are more used to travel and are also exposed to foreign beers. Pubs have become popular, with many beers on tap, which unfortunately are not poured and served correctly. Bottled beer is sometimes a better option. Among the most important Italian producers are Moretti and Dreher (now both acquired by Heineken), Peroni (which also owns Wührer), Forst (based in Merano, in the Alto Adige), and Splügen and Poretti (both owned by Carlberg). A few small producers are limiting their activities to higher-quality, more expensive beers, such as Menabrea in Biella (Piedmont) or Castello near Udine (Friuli).

## MEATS

While pulses traditionally constituted the main source of protein for most Italian populations and meat was limited to festive or special occasions, in the past 50 years the per capita consumption of meat has dramatically increased. In the past, the so-called Mediterranean diet, mainly based on carbohydrates and vegetables, was probably a forced choice for many farmers or less-affluent people in the country. When the economic development allowed them to afford more meat, they bought it. The trend is now reversed. In the past few years, also as a consequence of the mad-cow-disease scare, Italians are consuming less meat, especially less beef.

From the culinary point of view, there are various traditional ways to cook meat besides the most common methods of frying it in some kind of fat, roasting it in the oven, and grilling it. Boiled in water, it can be made either into *lesso* or *bollito*. *Lesso* means that the meat is placed in a pot with cold water, usually together with vegetables such as potatoes or carrots and herbs, and brought to a boil in order to obtain a rich broth. In this case, the meat ends up being quite bland to the taste, and it is customarily used to make meatballs, which are made richer in flavor with various ingredients and cooking methods (stewing, frying, or braising). In the case of *bollito*, meat is dropped in boiling water. The sudden contact seals the surface of the meat, keeping all its juices inside. If the resulting broth is less tasty and rich, the meat, on the other hand, is scrumptious and suc-

culent. Various cuts of meat (beef, poultry, and pork cured cuts) are cooked together to prepare *bollito* in the northern areas of Italy, especially all along the river Po plain, where meat production is more diffused. The richer the *bollito*, the more cuts are added. This dish is traditional served with boiled potatoes, carrots, and onions, but a few sauces are also popular in some specific areas. In Piedmont, *bagnet verd* is made with parsley, garlic, egg yolks, bread crumbs, anchovies, and capers; *sausa d'avie* has honey, walnuts, stock, and mustard as its main ingredients, while *cognà* is based on grapes, apples or pears, figs, cinnamon, and cloves. In Veneto, the most common sauce for *bollito* is *pearà*, made with bread crumbs, stock, beef marrow, butter, salt, and pepper.

*Brasato* (braising) is a cooking method particularly useful for bigger cuts of meat. The piece, first seared in butter, lard, or olive oil, is covered with liquid (wine, water, a marinade, milk, or broth) and left to simmer slowly with spices and herbs. *Stufato* is a method similar to braising, but the meat is simmered in liquid since the beginning, with no initial searing. When the meat is cooked to the point that it breaks down, the dish is then called *stracotto*. The most common stewed dish is *spezzatino*, made of small pieces of meat often cooked with legumes or vegetable. In Venezia Giulia, a particular kind of *spezzatino* is *gulash*, also common to many areas of central Europe, made of chunks of beef cooked with tomato, paprika, and potatoes. When meat is cooked with tomatoes, the resulting sauce is called *ragù*, and it is mostly used to season pasta. Sometimes this preparation is also known as *Bolognese* sauce. In the north, ground meat is mostly used, while in the south, especially in Naples, there is a preference for larger chunks. The meats of choice for *ragù* are usually beef and pork, although some people like to add some *pancetta* to it.

## BEEF

While in the past poultry and pigs were the most important source of meat because they could be raised easily, in more recent years the consumption of beef and veal has increased enormously. Both are used for different purposes and dishes. The various cuts have different denominations according to the age and the area where the meat is sold. At times, even Italians do not have an easy time understanding what they are buying, especially if they are in a region other than home. *Vitellone* is male (castrated or not) or female (before giving birth) between 18 and 24 months. *Manzo* is a castrated male under 4 years of age or a female that has never given birth under 3 years. When the castrated male is older than 4 years,

it is called *bue*, while the noncastrated male older than 2 is called *toro*, or bull. A female older than 3 or a younger one that has given birth is called *vacca*. Any animal younger than 18 months that weighs less than 300 kilograms and that has only sucked milk is called *vitello*. Veal meat is paler, its smell is vaguely milkier, and its fat is totally white, with no rose or red stripes. Sometimes hormones are used to raise the calves and make them bigger, although these procedures are outlawed in Italy. In this case the flesh has a higher content of water. Even at its best, *vitello* meat is not as tasty as the adult meat; nevertheless, it is more tender and more versatile for all kinds of preparations. It is especially popular in northern Italy. For instance, it is consumed in a light milk sauce, called *guazzetto*, or with a tuna fish-based sauce (*vitello tonnato*). A famous dish made of veal rib roast is the so-called Milanese cutlet (*cotoletta alla Milanese*): The rib is covered first in egg and then in bread crumbs before being fried in butter till its turns golden. Another recipe from Milan is *ossobuco*, slices of cross-cut shank (including the bone and the marrow) quickly passed in flour, slowly braised with onion, stock, and white wine, and then seasoned with chopped rind of lemon, parsley, and garlic. A veal cut that is quite appreciated all over the northern part of Italy is the lower part of the shank (*stinco*), either braised or roasted, while *scaloppina*, a thin, round slice from the rump, is popular all over the country. Veal is considered particularly good for small children, since it is supposedly softer, easier to digest, and less fatty.

Some cuts of beef are even eaten raw, as in Piedmont, where the best meat is roughly chopped and seasoned with olive oil and pepper (sometimes lemon is added to it). Beef is also thinly sliced and seasoned with lemon juice and salt to make *carpaccio*, which is often served with fresh arugula and tiny bits of *parmigiano reggiano*. In Lombardy, on the other hand, parts of the thigh are cured with pepper and salt and then aged. This *salume* is called *bresaola*, and it is usually consumed thinly sliced and seasoned with olive oil or lemon. Many also like to eat the bitter vegetable *arugula* with it.

Although beef and veal are now available all over the country, it was not so in the past. Cows were much more prevalent in the north, especially around the big Po River plain, where they were used to plow fields and had enough space to graze. The widespread presence of cows also made butter the most common cooking fat. In the rest of the peninsula, especially in the mountain areas in the south, cows were more infrequent and considered prized items. The consumption of their meat was uncommon and limited to the highest strata of the population.

**Beef Stew with Peppers (*Spezzatino ai Peperoni*)**

- 2 yellow peppers
- 1 1/2 pounds lean beef
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1 pound ripe tomatoes, diced
- fresh sage
- fresh rosemary
- salt
- pepper

Wash the peppers and cut them into thin slices, discarding the seeds and the white parts in the interior. Cut the beef in 1 1/2-inch-thick dices. Pour the olive oil into a large, heavy-bottomed pot. Heat the oil over a medium-high flame and add the diced meat, stirring until it is nicely browned all over, for about 10 minutes. Remove the meat from the pot and keep it warm between two plates. Add the sliced onion to the pot together with a few leaves of sage and a small twig of rosemary. Sauté until the onion softens. Add the meat and stir. Season with salt and pepper. Pour in the wine and cook until it evaporates. Add the diced tomato, cover with a lid, lower the heat, and let simmer for an hour, adding water if necessary. Add the sliced peppers and simmer for about an hour, until the meat is soft.

**HORSE**

In some areas, such as Veneto and Puglia, horses provided nutritious and tasty red meat, although it was constantly considered with suspicion, because only the older animals that had worked for years in the fields or for transportation were butchered, and the slaughtering conditions were not the best. It is still required that horse meat be sold in specialized shops with a specific seal (a letter E, like *equino*, another word for horse) so that it can not be passed for beef. Special breeds have been selected to obtain better meat, and nowadays its quality is quite high. High in protein and low in fat, horse meat, which has a sort of sweet taste due to the presence of the sugar glycogen, is considered particularly good for children and the sick. Horse meat is consumed as steak. It is usually grilled; braised for a very long time till the meat breaks down, as in the case of *pastissada de caval* from Verona; or, in southern Italy, rolled and used to make a tomato-based sauce for pasta. Horse meat was also eaten in Lazio as *coppiette*, thin

salted and dried strips. Traditionally consumed when drinking wine, *coppette* have almost disappeared.

### PORK AND SALUMI

Well into the twentieth century, the small amounts of meat most people were able to obtain were not beef or horse, but rather pork, mutton, and poultry. Small animals were easy to keep in the villages or on the farms and did not require significant investments of money.

Pigs have always been popular in Italy, and it is well known that almost every part of the animal can be used one way or another, including inedible elements such as bristles and bones. The intestines and the skin (*cotenna*) are used to encase the ground pork meat that is cured, seasoned, and aged to become an *insaccato*, such as *salami*. Parts that in the United States would not be considered suitable for eating, like the tail, the whole head, the snout, the ears, and the feet, are delicacies in many parts of Italy. For instance, in central Italy, cheeks, ears, snout, and tongue are cut into pieces, boiled in water, aromatized with herbs and spices, wrapped in a cloth, and left to cool under a weight till it takes a solid form. This specialty, called *coppa* in Rome, is served sliced, often as a cold appetizer. In Naples, street stands sell pieces of snout and feet boiled in water with bay leaves and with lemon juice squeezed on them (*o pere e o musso*, literally "the snout and the feet" in Neapolitan dialect). When pork fat is rendered, the tiny bits of meat that are left from the preparation, called *ciccioli* or *sfrizzoli*, are used in several recipes. When the pig is killed, even the blood is gathered and used to make sausages or desserts (*sanguinaccio*), with the addition of ingredients such as sugar or chocolate, especially in the south.

Not much of the pig is actually consumed as fresh meat. The parts commonly used this way are those around the ribs and the vertebrae, the back, and the loin, in cuts such as pork chops, spare ribs, center rib roast, more rarely loin, tenderloin, and shoulder. These cuts are usually roasted or grilled, and more rarely, stewed. In central Italy, whole pigs are roasted with various spices, including garlic, pepper, and rosemary, till the skin is golden and crunchy. This preparation, called *porchetta*, is sold by the weight, with the tasty skin being extremely in demand. Sliced, it is often eaten in a *panino*. *Porchetta* is often sold on the street in specialized vans or in huts in the countryside that also sell wine and bread.

Nevertheless, most of the noblest parts of the pig are used for curing. Since pre-Roman times, pork meat has been cured and conserved all over

Italy. Most techniques to preserve meat were developed by Celtic cultures first, and then by Germanic cultures later. The Celts discovered ways to extract salt from the soil (as in the area of Salsomaggiore near Parma, in Emilia Romagna) and to use it to make pork meat, one of their favorites, last longer. When different waves of German populations migrated to northern and central Italy, they revived the strong interest in pork and wild boar, an element that had never subsided during Roman times. Furthermore, the vast extensions of wood and uncultivated land favored the expansion of pig herding, which did not require much care and organization. Since then, cured pork has always been a very popular ingredient all over Italy and on all kinds of tables, from noble banquets to farmers' pantries. Its success was due to the long duration and the culinary versatility of these kinds of products, which ensured cheap animal proteins when fresh meat was difficult to find or simply too expensive. If nomadic populations tended to consume very lean and almost wild pigs, which lost most of their fat during their outdoor life, the Romans began keeping pigs in smaller spaces in the proximity of homes and farms. The animals got less exercise, so their meat became fatter. Anyone who could afford it would raise their own pigs to slaughter them in the fall, usually October or November, when the cold climate would make the curing easier and the meat last longer. Sausages and other cuts would then be hung in cellars, in kitchens, or any place that the specific aging process for each product required. Pigs were raised all over Italy, with the notable exceptions of the coasts of Liguria, Tuscany, Lazio, and Puglia, which traditionally cannot boast any cured products derived from pig. The reason might be the abundance of olive trees in these areas, which enhanced the consumption of olive oil.

These traditional procedures and habits survived without much change until a few decades ago, when a new consciousness about healthy eating started favoring the leanest varieties of pigs again. At the same time, it became more unusual for families to raise and kill their own pigs; the animals are now raised, slaughtered, and cured in specialized plants varying in scale from small local producers to huge industries.

Cured pork meat can be generally called a *salume*, which indicates that salt has been used to preserve it. *Salume* need to be distinguished from *salame*, a particular category of *salume* made of ground pork meat and spices. When the cured meat is wrapped in a piece of pig intestine, skin, or other kinds of artificial wrappers and then aged, *salume* is usually called *insaccato*. We can distinguish two main types of cured pork meat—those that are made of whole parts of the animal, either with or without wrap-

ping, and those made of ground meat, which necessarily require some sort of wrapping, usually a piece of intestine.

The most famous whole-cut *salume* is definitely *prosciutto crudo*, cured raw ham from the rear thigh of the pig. *Prosciutti* are produced in many areas, but the most appreciated are those from San Daniele, in the Friuli province of Udine, and those from the province of Parma, in particular around the town of Langhirano. The San Daniele *prosciutto* also includes the lower leg and the foot of the animal, while the Parma variety is only made with the thigh. The first phase of the aging process for the San Daniele requires the use of a press so that the *prosciutto* ends up looking thinner, while the Parma definitely look fatter. Other renowned areas for the production of *prosciutto crudo* are Valdossola in Piedmont; the Colli Euganei area in Veneto, including parts of the provinces of Padova, Vicenza, and Verona; Carpegna and Montefeltro in the province of Pesaro, in the Marche region; Norcia in the Umbria region, near the town of Perugia; and the Nebrodi mountains in Sicily. Each area developed its own techniques to cure and age the *prosciutto crudo*, according to the local climate conditions (including winds, humidity, precipitation, and altitude) and the cultural traditions. For instance, in the case of *prosciutto di Parma*—probably the most world famous because it is produced in larger quantities than any other—only salt is used in the first phases of the aging process, which takes place in a very cold environment. Only the upper thigh, still covered in its skin, is used. After a few weeks, all excess parts of the *prosciutto* (protruding bone, extra meat) are cut away to give it its usual look, and the meat parts are covered in a paste made of rice flour, pork fat, salt and pepper. The second and longer aging phase takes place in warmer temperatures. The whole process lasts between 12 and 30 months. At the end of the minimum age, inspectors from the consortium (the association of producers that certifies the quality) test the *prosciutto*. By inserting a needle made of horse bone in five specific places and by smelling the odors that stick on the bone, they can determine whether the *prosciutto* is fit for packaging and consumption.

Other *prosciutti*, similar in terms of curing and aging techniques, are made from leaner pigs, probably a result of the older custom of letting the animals roam free. These are called mountain *prosciutti* (*prosciutti di montagna*), which are usually lower in fat content but higher in salt. Besides, they tend to be slightly less tender, but nevertheless rich in flavor and texture. Sometimes *prosciutto* is cooked, and in that case it is called *prosciutto cotto*, produced both at the artisanal and at the industrial level. The same cooking process is applied to the so-called shoulder (*spalla*), the front thigh.

A very particular kind of *prosciutto* is *speck* from Alto Adige, an area close to Austria. The thigh, deboned and cleaned, is left for a couple of weeks in vats with water, salt, juniper, garlic, and sugar. The cured meat is then dried and exposed to the smoke of aromatic wood for about three weeks. Successively, *speck* is aged for six months in cool cellars.

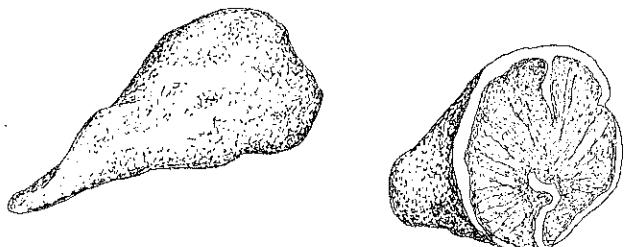
Procedures similar to those for pork *prosciutto* are used to cure and age thighs of other animals such as goose in Mortara, Lombardy, and in Palmanova, in the province of Udine of Friuli; goat in Lombardy (the so-called violin); wild boar in Tuscany, in the province of Siena.

Among the cured pork products that do not require any kind of wrapping or protection, *lardo* and *pancetta* are particularly important because of their extensive use in cooking. Although the word *lardo* can be used to refer to the fat under the skin of the animal (often ground and rendered to make *strutto*), it more specifically refers to the fat on the rear part of the pig's back. *Lardo*, which contains almost no lean meat, can be cured in different ways: in wood containers, as in the case of the *lardo* from Arnad, in Val d'Aosta region, or in marble vats, as for the *lardo* from Colonnata, in northwestern Tuscany. Different aging periods and the spices used to cure the meat together with salt give to each kind of *lardo* its specific flavor and texture. *Lardo* can be made into a paste used as a cooking base for sauces or soups. The same paste can be used to make roasts more tender and tasty. In this case small holes are made in the meat and then filled with *lardo* (or *strutto*) mixed with salt and herbs. When *lardo* is particularly tasty, as in the case of *lardo di Colonnata*, it can be eaten raw in thin slices, especially on top of freshly grilled bread, or *bruschetta*. *Pancetta*, on the other hand, is obtained by curing the ventral region of the animal. It usually contains more lean meat, and it is cured either with salt and spices or through a smoking process following the spicing phase. *Pancetta* can be bought either flat (*tesa*) or rolled up (*arrovolata*). Unlike bacon, it is seldom eaten by itself, although it is widely used in many local cuisines as a cooking base, thinly sliced or diced, sautéed in a pan and then added to specific dishes. A very special kind of *pancetta* is *guanciale*, obtained from the fatty meat right under the neck and the jaw of the pig (*guancia* actually means "cheek"). It is very popular in central Italy, especially in Lazio, where it is used to make a typical pasta dish, *pasta all'americana*, together with fresh peeled tomatoes and onions. *Lardo*, *pancetta*, and *guanciale* were commonly used for cooking, together with *strutto* (also called *sugna*), made by boiling the fattest parts of the animal and then filtering it and letting it cool down to a paste. In the past few decades the culinary use of these products is less and less popular because of their impact on cholesterol levels.

The most renowned whole-cut meat in a wrapping is *culatello*, probably the most expensive *salume* in Italy, which is produced in the villages of Zibello and Soragna near Parma, in the Emilia Romagna region. From the name, it is clear that *culatello* is made from the buttocks of the animal (*culo* is the Italian word for "buttocks"). The buttock is separated from the rest of the thigh, and when the meat is still warm after the slaughtering, it is massaged in salt, pepper, spices, and wine and then aged for a couple of weeks. Then the meat is placed inside the pig's bladder and tied up in a peculiar fashion that gives it its characteristic drop shape. *Culatello* then needs an aging period of at least 11 months, favored by the humid climate of the Po River plain, where the towns of Zibello and Soragna are located. In this area, the anterior part of the pork's thigh is not discarded but used to make the so-called *fiocco*, processed as a *prosciutto*. The rest of the leg is deboned and sowed, after a treatment with salt and spices, in a triangular form. It is called "priest's hat" (*cappello da prete*, which used to be triangular) and usually served with a vegetable sauce.

Another cured pork cut aged in a wrapping is *capocollo* or *coppa*, obtained from the meat between the neck and the sixth rib, which is salted and often massaged with wine and spices (the recipes differ according to the production area). It is then placed inside a piece of intestine that protects the meat during its slow aging process. A similar *salume* is *lonza*, made from the middle back of the animal, which is slightly fatter than the *capocollo*.

Ground meat *salumi* are even more diffused than the whole-cut ones, especially because of their lower prices and the richer taste provided by the presence of fat and spices in the meat mix. *Salumi* can be distinguished in two main categories: those that can be consumed raw, and hence require a longer aging process, and those that need to be cooked. Between the latter, the most common are surely sausages (*salsicce*), ground pork



Prosciutto and *culatello*.

meat seasoned with salt, pepper, and spices that are pressed into the pig intestine and then divided in smaller portions by twine knots, with the exception of *lunganega*, a very long sausage that is cut according to different needs. Sausages, which are more or less spicy, are usually consumed within a few days after production. Otherwise they can be conserved in olive oil or *strutto* (rendered fat), which avoid the contact between the sausages and the atmosphere. In this case the sausages are usually eaten raw, spread on slices of bread. *Cotechino* is a special kind of sausage, made with meat, lard, and skin, all ground quite roughly and put into the pig's intestine, usually consumed after a long boiling and accompanied by various sauces. When the same mix is put inside the skin of the pig's leg, with the foot still attached, it is called *zampone* (big leg), which also needs to be boiled for a long time before eating. *Zampone* is very popular especially at Christmas and New Year's Eve, when it is consumed with mashed potatoes, vegetables, or lentils. A very particular kind of ground meat *salume* that needs cooking is *salama da sugo* (salami for sauce) from Ferrara, in the Emilia Romagna region. The mix, containing liver, tongue, and noble parts of the animal such as the sirloin, is mixed with red wine and other spices and then put inside the pig's bladder. The sausage is hung in a cool place for at least one year, until it dehydrates and hardens. When it is time to eat it, the *salama da sugo* is left soaking in a big pot of cold water, hanging from strings so that it does not touch the metal, and then brought to a slow boil for a few hours. The hardened meat then becomes moist and tasty again, and it is usually consumed with mashed potatoes or pumpkins.

The aged *salumi*, usually harder and eaten raw in slices, are called *salami*. They are innumerable all over Italy, and making a list would be impossible. Among the most renowned ones, we can mention the medium-grained *cacciatorino* and the fine-grained *salame Milano* from Lombardy; the *felino* from the area in Parma, in the Emilia Romagna region, which contains 15 percent of ground *pancetta*; the *salame Fabriano*, made near Ancona, in the Marche region, where *ciauscolo* is also made, a very soft *salame* that is usually spread on bread; *finocchiona* in Tuscany, with its characteristic flavor given by the presence of fennel seeds and of ground *guanciale* fat; the spicy *ventricina* from Abruzzo; the hard and spicy *salsiccia di Napoli*, quite similar to Spanish chorizo; and the soft and extremely spicy *soppressata* in Puglia, Calabria, and Sicily.

The same system is used to make similar products from other kind of meats, such as cow *salami* in the Val d'Aosta region, donkey and horse *salami* in Piedmont and Alto Adige, the goose *salami* in the Jewish tradition, the wild boar *salami* in Tuscany.

Another very famous ground-meat pork product is *mortadella*, commonly known in the United States as *bologna*, taking its name from the city where it originated. For many years, *mortadella* from Italy had been banned, because of epidemics that struck the pigs in Italy many decades ago; in the meanwhile Americans got used to ersatz products that rarely taste anything like the real thing. First-rate pork cuts are finely ground and mixed with cubes of fat, salt, spices, and whole grains of pepper. Sometimes pistachios are added. Then the mix is cooked in special dry-air ovens for a period of a few hours to a whole day, depending on the meat. After that, the fresh *mortadella* is run through cold water, dried, and left to cool.

*Salumi* play an important role in the dietary customs of Italians. Their use in cooked dishes is limited, with the exception of sausages, which are always very popular, and other fatty cuts such as *pancetta* or *lardo*. *Salumi* are also used to make various fillings: *prosciutto* for *tortellini* and *salami*, and sausages for many savory tarts and puffy pastry delicacies. *Salumi* are mostly consumed as cold cuts, either in panini or as an appetizer. It is common to find on restaurant menus a selection of local cold cuts, often served together with cheese, olives, or other vegetables conserved with oil or vinegar. At home, a choice of cold cuts is always a good option when people do not feel like cooking. Is it not unusual to keep some *salumi* in the pantry or in the fridge for any emergency. Most groceries sell them by the pound and slice them on demand, while supermarkets tend to sell them already cut in vacuum packages to maintain the flavor and the aroma.

#### MUTTON AND GOAT

Together with pork, mutton was the most common meat in central and southern Italy, especially on the mountain areas. Chapter 1 mentioned *transumanza*, a tradition dating back to the pre-Roman populations of Italy who in winter used to lead their flocks from the northern part of the Apennines to the southern plains of Puglia and in summer would make their way back north. Things have not changed much since then, and most sheep are still free ranging. The traditional Italian breeds (from Sardinia, Puglia, and Abruzzo) are becoming rarer, because of their low yield in terms of milk and meat, while foreign ones are taking over. From the commercial point of view, mutton is sold in various categories, classified according to the animal's age: suckling lamb (*agnello da latte o abbacchio*, butchered at three or four weeks); lamb up to 16 pounds that has followed a mixed milk and grass

diet; lamb more than 16 pounds nourished with grass only; and adult sheep, some of which are castrated to get a softer meat and a less pungent flavor. Suckling lamb is usually roasted or grilled. Older lambs can be prepared in other ways, such as *in fricassea* (an egg, parsley, and lemon-based sauce cooked in the lamb juice, and in some areas with artichokes) or *alla cacciatora* (sautéed with oil, garlic, rosemary, and white wine). In Abruzzo, one of the regions with the highest consumption of this kind of meat, lamb is typically prepared in a cheese and egg sauce (*cacio e uova*), or with bell peppers and tomato. In Campania, a traditional recipe is lamb with sweet peas and eggs. In Puglia and Basilicata, the meat is stewed with onions, celery, small tomatoes, spicy chili pepper, thyme, and bay leaves to make *cuturiddi*. Older mutton is either roasted or stewed or, more rarely, used to make soups or pasta sauces because of the intense flavor. Goats, which are definitely less common than sheep, are mostly butchered when they are still kids, because the meat tends to become tougher with age. In the best butcher's shops, the animals are sold with the head and the tail on to differentiate them from lambs. The smell is different, and the meat is almost totally devoid of fat. Also baby goats are mostly consumed grilled or roasted either in a pan or on the skewer, although in the south other more complex preparations are quite popular.

#### COURTYARD ANIMALS

Together with pork and mutton, poultry and rabbit were the most common kind of meat for the lower classes all over Italy. Almost everybody was able to raise a couple of hens and some rabbits near the house, to the point that these two very different animals are often classified under the general denomination of so-called courtyard animals. Nowadays, chicken (*pollo*) is certainly the most-consumed kind of poultry (also in the form of capon or *cappone*, a castrated and fattened male chicken), followed by turkey (*tacchino*), duck (*anatra*), goose (*oca*), Cornish hen (*polletto*), guinea fowl (*faraona*), pigeon (*piccione*), and quail (*quaglia*). In the past, especially in Roman times, peacocks and cranes were also highly appreciated, but they are no longer consumed. As in the United States, free-ranging chickens are harder to find and more expensive, but are of definitely better quality. The meat is more compact, does not fall off the bones when cooked, and is also usually tastier, especially if the animal has been fed with grains and natural fodder. There is less fat and it is evenly distributed all over the body. Chicken is prepared in various ways: cut in pieces or whole, boiled, stewed, roasted, grilled, or sautéed, with all kinds of sauces

and accompaniments. In central Italy, for instance, chicken is often served *alla cacciatora* (cut in pieces sautéed with oil, white wine, garlic, and rosemary, sometimes with the addition of capers and black olives) or *alla diavola* (sautéed with red bell peppers and hot chili pepper). In Tuscany it is possible to find recipes of fried chicken similar to those in the United States. In Trentino, chicken is stuffed with beef marrow, walnuts, pine nuts, liver, and eggs and then boiled. In Umbria, it is prepared *in porchetta*; that is to say, it is roasted in a pot with the same condiments used to make pork *porchetta*—wild fennel, rosemary, garlic, and *pancetta*. In many areas, pieces of chicken are boiled inside the animal skin together with various ingredients and eaten cold in a jelly made from chicken stock. This dish, usually served sliced, is called *galantina*. Older chickens are commonly boiled to obtain broth, while the long cooking process allows the meat to become softer. Capon, usually fatter and more tender than chicken, is mostly boiled. At Christmas, capon broth is very popular with stuffed fresh pasta like *tortelli* or *agnoli* in Piedmont, Lombardy, and Emilia Romagna. It is also served roasted or stuffed. Until a few years ago, guinea fowls were considered semiwild animals; the meat, darker and firmer, tended to be tastier, and required longer cooking times. Nowadays they are raised like free-ranging chickens, and their meat is similar to other poultry while maintaining a certain gamy flavor.

Turkey has been popular since its arrival from the Americas, due to its similarity to chicken and its ability to be kept in courtyards. In Italy, turkey is usually preferred roasted, and it is often stuffed on festive occasions (that is the case of the Christmas turkey in Lombardy, where the fowl is stuffed with sausage, ground veal meat, apples, chestnuts, and other ingredients). In the village of Canzano, in Abruzzo, it is deboned, boiled with abundant pepper, and left to cool in its own stock till this becomes a jelly. In the past few years turkey consumption has definitely increased, often used as a lean substitute for red meat.

Ducks are also often considered red meat, and hence they eaten rare or medium rare, especially in the case of lean breasts. Thighs require longer cooking. Domestic ducks tend to be quite fatty, so it is advisable to drain the extra melted fat during the cooking process. Wild ducks, increasingly rare in Italy, have a gamier flavor and firmer meat. Younger ducks are preferred roasted, while older animals are rather braised with different sauces. In many areas, ducks are stuffed before braising. In Italy duck *foie gras* is virtually absent in the traditional cuisine, although it is now possible to buy it in most gourmet shops and to consume it according to the French tradition.

Goose *foie gras*, a preparation created by the Romans, survived in certain areas and in Jewish communities all over the country. As a matter of fact, for centuries Italian Jews used geese instead of pigs, making *salumi* and even rendered fat. Due to their large size and their scarcity, geese are now mostly prepared for festive or special occasions. Goose meat, more tender than duck, is preferred roasted or braised.

Pigeon has seen a certain revival in factory farms, raised industrially with the exception of the Torresano variety in Veneto, where the birds live in structures similar to actual towers, hence the name (*torre* means "tower"). Pigeons are at their best before they start flying and their meat becomes tougher. For this reason each pigeon is usually good for a single portion, although foreign varieties tend to be bigger, ensuring two portions per bird. Pigeons are usually sold without feathers but with their livers, which do not contain gall. Pigeons are cooked in the oven, often stuffed, or braised with various sauces that change according to the local tradition.

Rabbits are usually regarded as courtyard animals, with their white meat that is similar to poultry and that is now particularly appreciated for its leanness and its high protein content. In the past, rabbit was considered a second-rate meat because often the animals were fed the wrong kind of grass, and the taste was unpleasant. Today greater care is dedicated to choose the right fodder, and the results are definitely more enticing. Young rabbits, between two- and five-months-old, are the more versatile in the kitchen, while older ones are better when braised with sauces like *salmì*, made with red wine in which the meat is marinated together with spices, different herbs, and sometimes stock. Rabbit meat is also often sautéed in small pieces, with peppers or olives and other herbs.

## GAME

If rabbits are traditionally raised on farms and in courtyards, their wild counterparts, hares, are still among the most praised catches for hunters. Despite a growing sense of unease toward this activity, which is often considered a cruel and pointless sport, hunting still plays an important role in rural environments, although it is now strictly controlled. It is not possible to hunt year round, but it is necessary to wait for the legal season, determined by local governments according to the geographical character of the different areas and the animals that inhabit them. Many species are protected, although poachers are still a problem all over the country. At any rate, getting a gun permit is not as easy as it is in the United States.

The protection regulations, which are usually quite effective, have been able to prevent the extinction of certain endangered species, although at times the opposite result has occurred: Some previously endangered animals that were once protected have overpopulated certain areas. This is the case with wild boars, which literally invaded some hill areas where they constituted a threat to the local agriculture, to the point that now it is much easier to legally hunt them. It is not by chance that in some areas of Abruzzo or Tuscany it has become common to find boar sausages, *salame*, or *prosciutto*. Besides wild boar, many birds are still hunted, such as pheasants, woodcocks, and partridges. Roe deer, although rare and very protected, are very appreciated in the north. Most game meat needs to ripen for a couple of days or more in order to lose the peculiar gamy flavor. While the smaller birds and the tenderest cuts of bigger animals are usually grilled or roasted, the tougher pieces are braised or stewed.

### INNARDS

In the past, hunting and poaching were effective ways for farmers and the poor to obtain the animal protein they usually lacked. For city dwellers, it was not so easy to obtain wild animals that could not be purchased. Many had to resort to innards and low-quality cuts. In Rome, for instance, a whole cuisine developed around the so-called fifth quarter, or *quinto quarto*. Many workers in the local slaughterhouses were paid with whatever was left from the butchering process, hence the name *quinto quarto*, in which *quarti* were the noble quarters of meat that those people could not afford.<sup>13</sup> Brain, sweetbreads, liver, kidneys, testicles, spleen, hearts, and lungs are still popular, even if the youngest generations consume increasingly less of them. Also, pig feet, heads, tongue, and oxtail are often part of scrumptious recipes that can be found all over Italy. Innards are called *frattaglie* when they derive from beef, mutton, or pork; they are called *rigaglie* if they come from poultry. Spleen, for instance, is the main stuffing for *guastedde* in Palermo, a kind of leavened bread with sesame seeds and cheese. In Tuscany, it is sautéed and ground together with onions, anchovies, and stock to make a sort of spread that is used with *crostini*, small pieces of sliced bread. Beef tongue is either braised or *salmitrata*—that is to say, cured with salt and saltpeter, which gives it a particular red color. Brains, on the other hand, are often cut in small pieces, battered, and fried. Chicken livers, called *fegatini*, can be cooked with butter and sage, with artichokes, or diced in small pieces and added to soups or pasta. Beef liver is prepared with onions in Venice (*fegato alla*

*veneziana*), sautéed in a pan, or cooked with figs. This is a very ancient recipe, dating back to the Romans. As a matter of fact, the Italian word for liver, *fegato*, derives from the Latin expression *ficatum*, or "cooked with figs."

#### *Stewed Oxtail (Coda alla Vaccinara)*

- 4 1/2 pounds oxtail
- 2 ounces pork fat, finely ground, or lard
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic
- 2 cloves
- 1 cup white wine
- 2 (28-ounce) cans peeled, whole tomatoes
- 2 medium stalks celery, cut into long slivers
- 1 tablespoon pine nuts
- 1 tablespoon raisins
- 1 teaspoon cocoa powder
- salt
- pepper

Cut the oxtail into pieces. Wash the meat thoroughly. Heat the pork fat and olive oil in a large, heavy pan. Brown the meat and add onion, garlic, cloves, salt, and pepper. Cook for 5 minutes, add the white wine, cover the pan with a lid and cook for 15 minutes. Add the tomatoes and cook for one hour. Add enough water so the meat is covered with the sauce, cover the pan again, and cook very slowly for 5 or 6 hours, until the meat falls off the bone. Remove the oxtails from the cooking liquid and set aside. Boil the celery stalks in salted water until tender. Simmer the oxtail juices with the cooked celery, the pine nuts, the raisins, and the cocoa powder for 5 minutes. Pour the sauce over the meat when ready to serve.

#### EGGS

Hen eggs constitute a very important element in the everyday diet, just like anywhere else in the world where hens are readily available. Other kinds of eggs, like the small ones from quail or the larger ones from ducks and geese, are difficult to find and rarely used. Eggs are prepared in uncountable ways: scrambled, poached, hard boiled, or fried in oil or butter. Omelets, called *frittata* from the verb *frittare*, "to fry," are often made

tastier by adding various ingredients: milk and grated cheese; vegetables such as mushrooms, onions, artichokes, or zucchini; all kinds of herbs; and sausages and *prosciutto*. Eggs used to be baked under the ashes when hearths were common, but now those have become quite an unusual delicacy. Among the most interesting local recipes with eggs, we can mention the Roman *stracciatella* (eggs beaten in boiling broth), the Sicilian "black eggs" (*uova nere*, hard-boiled eggs cured in vinegar and fennel seeds), and the hard-boiled-egg soup from Padova (*sopa de uovi duri*, diced hard-boiled eggs with diced fried bread in broth).

### MILK AND ITS DERIVATIVES

Milk is not as popular a drink in Italy as it is in the United States. Italians might have it in the morning in *cappuccino* or *caffellatte*, but during the day its use is limited to the kitchen for some specific preparations. It is used to soften gratins, to prepare purées, or in pastry making.

Butter is often used as cooking fat, especially in the north. In other areas, olive oil and pork fat were traditionally more available and, in the case of pork fat, also more affordable. Butter is used to sauté specific dishes, like *scaloppine*, thin slices of veal meat covered in flour. It is also melted and poured over pasta, sometimes with grated cheese or together with herbs such as sage. Butter is widely used in pastry making but seldom used as an ingredient in sauces, with the exception of *béchamel*, the only classic French sauce that is commonly used in Italian cuisine.

Sour cream and buttermilk are virtually unknown. Plain cream is sometimes used in pastry or specific recipes. Starting from the 1970s, maybe under the influence of French *nouvelle cuisine*, it became fashionable to season pasta or *tortellini* with fresh cream together with other ingredients such as salmon or peas and ham. Nowadays, this custom is frowned upon as unhealthy and passé. Cream is often whipped with sugar and used in pastry or added to espresso.

Yogurt was not very common in the past. It became popular in the 1960s, when it started being mass-produced. It is not often used for cooking, with the exceptions of a few Greek or Middle Eastern recipes. It is instead consumed as a snack. Plain yogurt is considered too tart and acidic. It is often mixed with fruit, cereals, coffee, or even chocolate. Very few Italians have the patience to make it at home; most people prefer to buy the industrial brands, most often the low-fat varieties. Interestingly enough, the single-portion pots of yogurt are much smaller than in the United States, as is the case with much prepackaged food.

Cheese is by far the most important derivative of milk.<sup>14</sup> Italians consume it alone or in *panini*, but they also use it as an ingredient in many recipes. Mozzarella and *fontina*, which melt in long strings when cooked, are diced to make *lasagna* and other dishes. On the other hand, dry, hard cheeses such as *parmigiano reggiano*, *pecorino romano*, or *grana padano*, which melt without making strings, are grated and added to *risotto* or to the stuffing of *tortellini* and savory tarts. Grated cheese is also often sprinkled on top of pasta and soups.

Hundreds of cheeses are available in Italy. Their flavors, textures, and aromas differ, depending on the areas of production, available herbs, habits of the shepherds and herdmen, traditions, and technical know-how, among other things. There are myriad factors that make each cheese unique. Of course, this is only the case for traditionally produced cheese, which nowadays constitutes a tiny portion of all of the cheese sold and consumed in Italy. They are often limited in availability and distribution, being produced in small quantities and not all year round; they are also more expensive, because the production process is slow and often totally artisanal. It is important to point out that some of the most interesting, rarer cheeses are not necessarily protected by any DOP (or PDO, Protected Designation of Origin) and IGP (PGI, Protected Geographical Indication) regulations, which cover only 30 types of cheese. Some of these are actually produced in quite large amounts, even if under very strict quality control. Nevertheless, starting in the 1960s, growing levels of consumption developed a strong demand for cheeses that would be cheaper and available all over the country, maybe with less character but for this very reason more acceptable to some palates that were not accustomed to intense, sometimes almost offensive flavors. Responding to these needs, modern dairy industries created products and found ways to make them popular. Today shelves are full of heavily advertised products that are often soft, like cottage cheese or processed melted cheese, wrapped in aluminum foils in small triangles or circles, that do not require a long aging process. This does not account for the growing low-fat cheese market. Some industrial brands, such as Bel Paese Galbani, have acquired a certain respect because they have been around for a few decades and many people grew up eating them.

Going back to traditional cheeses, they can be classified in several ways. From the texture point of view, there are hard, semihard, soft, and fresh ones. If we consider the ingredients, cheese is mainly made with three kinds of milk: cow, water buffalo, and sheep. Goat milk is definitely rarer, often mixed with other kinds of milk. Geographically, cow milk is preva-

lent in the north, on the Alps, and in the Po River plain. In the peninsula and on the islands, sheep are the most common dairy animals; water buffaloes are raised only in southern Lazio and northern Campania to make mozzarella.

It would be impossible to give a complete list of Italian cheeses; we will limit ourselves to the most renowned. Starting from the northwest, the Val d'Aosta region is known for *fontina*, a quite fatty (45 percent) semi-hard cow-milk cheese that is very popular for gratin dishes. In Piedmont, *castelmagno* is one of the highest-priced and sought-after products of the region, from the homonymous village in the province of Cuneo. It belongs to the category defined in Italy as *erborinato*, showing greenish-blue veins that give a peculiar flavor. The wheels, exclusively made of cow cheese, are quite large, weighing around 8 pounds. Always in Piedmont, *bross* is made of leftover pieces matured in aqua vitae till the mixture acquires a very pungent flavor and smell. *Toma* is made with either whole or skim cow milk in the shape of a round dish, two- to four-inches thick, with a soft texture. At the border of the region of Lombardy, *gorgonzola* is probably the most famous *erborinato* cheese from Italy; its creamy texture and its ivory color are now appreciated all over the world, even if recently it has become difficult to find the strong kind that was popular decades ago. In the Valsassina Valley, *robiola* is a square-shaped, fresh or semihard cheese, usually aged in caves. In another Lombardy valley, Valtellina, *bitto* is made between June and September by cooking whole cow milk, to which up to 10 percent of goat milk can be added. The summer mountain herbs eaten by the cows give it its typical flavor. Also the PDO *taleggio* is produced in Lombardy, using uncooked whole cow milk. It is square-shaped, soft, and quite fatty (at least 48 percent). *Grana padano* and *parmigiano reggiano* are probably the most renowned Italian cheeses, exported all over the world. The former is produced in a very large area stretching into Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Trentino, and Emilia Romagna. It is a hard cheese, made once a day by mixing the cow milk obtained in the evening with the fresh milk of the morning and adding veal whey. The curd is then cooked and shaped into big wheels weighing 12 to 20 pounds. The wheels are left to age in a temperature between 15 and 22°C for at least 9 months. *Parmigiano reggiano* is similar to *grana*, but the wheels are kept floating in salted water between 20 and 30 days, and the aging process lasts at least 12 months. The longer preparation makes this cheese more expensive than *grana*, also because the production area is limited to a few provinces of Emilia Romagna and the province of Mantova in Lombardy. In the Po River plain and in the neighboring areas, *provolone valpadana* is

a very common cheese. Although at first it was probably produced in the south, now it is made in the north, with whole cow milk brought to a temperature of 37°C. Rennet is introduced, forming curds that cheese makers break into small pieces and then cook at a temperature around 45°C. The paste that is obtained, freed from all traces of whey, is worked by hand, left in salted water for some days, and then aged for at least 30 days. Provolone is found in a sweet version (*provolone dolce*) and in a harder, stronger one (*provolone piccante*).

Moving east toward the Veneto region, we find *asiago* cheese, which is actually produced around Trento by mixing the morning's fresh cow milk with the skim milk from the previous evening, salting the wheels, and then aging them for at least 6 months. This cheese is semihard, with a fat content ranging from 34 percent for the so-called *d'allevo* variety to 44 percent for the pressed type (*pressato*). Further east, *montasio* is a hard cow-milk cheese produced in Friuli and part of Veneto, ready to be consumed 2 months after being salted; it can also be grated after 12 months. Going south, past the Po River, sheep-milk cheese becomes the rule. The most common name for it is *pecorino* (from *pecora*, sheep). There are four different PDO *pecorino*. While *pecorino toscano* (from Tuscany) is soft or semihard, aged between 20 days and 4 months (for the hardest version), *pecorino romano* is hard, weighing 40 to 70 pounds, aged for at least 5 months and perfect to grate. Although the name would suggest this cheese comes from Rome, it is actually produced in Lazio, southern Tuscany, and Sardinia. In the late nineteenth century, when *pecorino romano* became very popular all over the world and the demand outgrew the actual output, cheese makers found that milk from Sardinian sheep gave very similar results, and part of the production was moved to the island. The actual *pecorino sardo* (from Sardinia) is slightly softer, aged for 20 to 60 days, made into small wheels (2 to 5 pounds), and not covered in the black rind that is typical of the *romano* variety. The Sicilian variety (*pecorino siciliano*) is made into wheels weighing 20 to 35 pounds, aged in baskets for at least 4 months and with a white-yellow rind that shows the traces of the basket.

Common sheep cheeses are *caciotta* or *casciotta*, usually quite soft but firm, with a 45 percent fat content and a delicate taste; *fiore sardo*, produced in Sardinia, with less fat but harder and with a more pungent flavor; and *ricotta*, which literally means "re-cooked." This popular cheese, which can also be made of cow milk, gets its name from the process of reheating leftover whey from the cheese-making process and then adding a little fresh milk. The resulting soft, relatively low-fat cheese (less than 20

percent fat content) is eaten fresh and used to season pasta, prepare savory tart fillings (often mixed with spinach), and make pastries such as the Sicilian *cannoli* and *cassata* cake. *Ricotta* can be pressed and dried and then left to age; it thus acquires a slightly spongy texture and a salty, milky flavor. This type, called salted ricotta (*ricotta salata*) is usually eaten on bread or crumbled over pasta or in salads. Sometimes it is baked in the oven (*ricotta al forno*).

In the south sheep-milk cheese is not an absolute rule; in fact, some interesting cow-milk cheese is made there. The most common are probably *scamorza* and *caciocavallo*, both semihard and similar in shape to a truncated cone, sometimes with a small knob at the top, depending on local customs. These kinds of cheeses are produced in many areas, such as Campania, Molise, Basilicata, Puglia, and Calabria.

The most famous southern cheese is definitely *mozzarella*, traditionally made with milk from the water buffaloes that are still living in the marshy areas in southern Lazio and the coasts of Campania. It is a fresh cheese—usually shaped as a round lump—that should be consumed when it is still drenched in whey. Many similar cheeses are also inappropriately called *mozzarella*, even if they are not made with buffalo milk and they are produced in other areas of Italy. The correct names for those products are *fior di latte*, *ovolo*, *ovolina*, and *treccia*, shaped like braids. Similar to *mozzarella* is *burrata di Andria*, from Puglia, which is stuffed with pieces of the same cheese mixed with thick cream.

### ICE CREAM, SORBET, AND GRANITA

Ice cream is the final result of technical developments dealing with the problem of refrigeration and preservation of food. As early as the eighth century B.C.E., the Chinese were able to store mountain ice all summer in underground caves or pits kept cool by evaporation. They might have invented the first device to freeze flavored syrup into sorbet, placing jars containing the liquid mixture in a combination of snow and saltpeter, or potassium nitrate, a kind of salt they also used to make explosive powders. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that these contraptions were brought to Europe by the merchants traveling to China during the Middle Ages, such as Marco Polo. The Italian habit of making sorbets was absorbed from the Muslims, who ruled Sicily for almost three centuries. Since the beginning of the caliphate, in the seventh century C.E., snow and ice, wrapped in straw, were carried to the courts of Damascus and then Baghdad from the surrounding mountains. The word *sorbet* derives from a Turkish word,

*chorbêt*, which in turn comes from the Arab word *charâb*, indicating a sweet fruit drink. The same word *charâb* is the origin of syrup. It is interesting how terms connected with confectionery and ice-related techniques are borrowed from the Muslims, who excelled in those culinary arts and had learned how to produce sugar from India. The Sicilians improved the methodology, and the new desserts conquered other Italian courts and soon the rest of Europe. In the seventeenth century, ice creams had already become the rage in the fashionable coffeehouses in all the capital cities.

By the 1870s, ice-making machines had been invented. These were often of industrial size, employing the expansion of compressed air or evaporation to volatile substances like ether and, successively, ammonia. These new techniques allowed a worldwide diffusion of sorbets and ice creams and industrial-level production. In Italy, people enjoy both mass-produced brands (*gelato confezionato*), which are available in groceries, supermarkets, and bars, and artisanal ice creams (*gelato artigianale*) sold in special shops (*gelaterie*), which are often open year round and often show the sign *Produzione Propria* (produced by the owner).

A simple frozen dessert is *granita*, a granular-textured, soupy ice flavored with lemon, orange, coffee, or other extracts. Since it is quite liquid, *granita* has to be consumed in a glass. Sicilians love to have it for breakfast together with a brioche (*brioscia*), a delicacy that is also often served with *gelato*. Its even simpler version is known in Rome as *grattachecca*, shaved ice with syrups and pieces of fresh or candied fruits on top, sold from street stalls that in summer are literally swamped by crowds, especially at night. Sorbet (*sorbetto*), made of water, syrups, or puréed fruit, and sometimes some milk or egg whites, is churned smooth while freezing. It has a creamier and more compact texture, which allows it to be eaten on cone-shaped wafers (*coni*) on the go. Very popular sorbet flavors are blackberry, raspberry, strawberry, lemon, orange, peach, apricot, and many other summer fruits. *Gelato*, on the other hand, is made with egg custard, sugar, and various flavorings, the most common flavors being vanilla, milk, chocolate, hazelnut, pistachio, coffee, and *zabaione*. Some gelato makers (*gelatai*) add milk or cream to achieve a denser texture. In Sicily, the base is often a sort of milk pudding thickened with corn starch, called *crema rinforzata* or strengthened cream, which is similar to blancmange (*biancomangiare*). This dessert, probably of Arabic origin, was extremely popular in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance all over Europe, and it is still found in Sicily, at times prepared with crushed almond milk (*latte di mandorla*). In the past few years, frozen yogurt has become a popular alterna-

tive. In this case the base is yogurt, which makes the result lighter and less fatty. For the lactose intolerant and the fat-free aficionados, it is now possible to find soymilk-based ice creams.

When *gelato* is blended with crushed ice and milk, it is called *frappé*, often with the addition of fresh fruit. A soft pie or a tart, filled with *gelato* and served semifrozen, is known as a *semifreddo*. *Semifreddo* is usually served in a cup or in slices on a saucer, and it is always eaten with a spoon.

### FISH AND SEAFOOD

Strangely enough, despite its geographical position and the extension of its coasts, Italy has never enjoyed an abundance of fish and seafood, which are rare and expensive. This is because the Mediterranean is much less rich in fish than the Atlantic and the Pacific. Marine biologists explain this phenomenon by its higher salt content, its lack in nutritive elements such as plankton, and the level of exploitation, which is historically very intense. After World War II, while the countries around the Mediterranean underwent a process of fast industrialization, pollution became an urgent problem that has been tackled only in the past few years. Filtration plants near the coasts and greater attention from the industries are rapidly improving the state of the sea.

The fish industry was paramount during the Roman Empire. Romans developed amazing techniques to raise fish and seafood in artificial basins, and fishermen were able to send their catch all over the country. Of course, this kind of consumption was mostly limited to richer citizens. With the arrival of the Germanic populations, these seashore fishing traditions virtually disappeared. When the expansion of Christianity increased the demand for fish due to its dietary norms (meat could not be consumed during many days of the year), the attention of farmers turned to freshwater sources—lakes, brooks, and marshes. The area around the northern lakes and the plain along the Po River, with its wide and intricate delta, became the center for this kind of production. Trout (*trota*), pike (*luccio*), and, above all, sturgeon (*storione*) acquired great prestige, reaching the tables of nobles and churchmen. In many areas around the Po, this fish is still added to *risotto*. Local lords would reserve the biggest fish for themselves and, in case of sturgeon, also its caviar. Farmers would be left with less refined fish, such as perch (*pesce persico*), tench (*tinca*), and carp (*carpa*), whose muddy taste often revealed their provenance from marshes and still waters. In some areas in northern Italy, these fish are still forced to swallow vinegar before being killed to avoid that un-

pleasant flavor. Eels (*anguilla*) also reached a certain status, appreciated for their delicate and fat meat. Eel, especially the larger and meatier female known in southern Italy as *capitone*, is still very popular on Christmas Eve; they are consumed grilled, stewed, or fried. River shrimp were extremely abundant in the past but were shunned by the higher strata of society, as in the case of crawfish in the southern United States. Nowadays they have virtually disappeared, destroyed by an epidemic at the end of the nineteenth century and by growing river pollution due to massive industrialization. Also frogs were caught and eaten, especially the legs. Along the shores, most of the fish was still gathered to reach the market and ended up on rich tables. Fishermen were left with the smallest fish and less valuable seafood, often using them to make soups. This explains the presence of many recipes for fish soups all along the coast of Italy, each with different ingredients (tomato, wine, vinegar, saffron, sweet pepper).

Nowadays, sea fish is widely available both fresh and frozen. The most prized species are surely the sea bass (*spigola*) and the gilthead bream (*orata*), for which rich recipes can be found all over the country. Sea bass is served with a thick parsley-based sauce in Tuscany (*al verde*), stuffed with seafood near Naples, or grilled with lemon over olive wood in Sicily. Gilthead bream is roasted in the oven with pomegranate juice near Venice, served with chopped herbs and *prosciutto* in the Marche, or filleted and sprinkled with orange juice in Sicily. Flat fish such as sole (*sogliola*) and turbot (*rombo*) are usually roasted in a pan, although sole is often filleted, floured, and fried. Skate (*razza*) is one of the main ingredients for a famous Roman dish, *minestra d'arzilla*, together with broccoli. Among the most appreciated fish we can name wreckfish (*cernia*), dentex (*dentice*), John Dory (*pesce San Pietro*), red mullet (*triglia*), and scorpionfish (*scorfano*). Salmon is also quite common and eaten both fresh and smoked.

A special category—in a classification that can absolutely not be considered scientific—is the so-called blue fish (*pesce azzurro*), which includes fish that live far from the coasts, with a steel-blue color on the back and a white-silver color on the belly. Small fish such as herring (*aringa*), anchovies (*alice*), sardines (*sardina*), mackerels (*sgombro*), and big ones like tuna (*tonno*) and swordfish (*pesce spada*) fall into this category. Small *pesce azzurro* is quite cheap on the market, despite its high nutritional value. The most popular, anchovies, can be consumed fried, baked in the oven (covered with bread crumbs, parsley, garlic, and lemon), and raw, simply marinated in vinegar or lemon. Anchovies are also cured in salt and olive oil, and they appear as ingredients in many

recipes, especially in southern Italy. Tuna is eaten fresh, mostly grilled, but it is also conserved in water or olive oil. Canned tuna fish is extremely popular, added to salads, eaten with beans or potatoes, or used to enrich tomato sauces.

Fish is usually served whole and not filleted as in the United States. Most consumers would buy frozen filleted fish, while they would be extremely suspicious about fresh filleted fish, since it would be almost impossible to assess its actual freshness. Buyers like to personally check the state of the eyes and the gills, the color, the shine, and the smell; all of these elements cannot be controlled when the fish is filleted. Furthermore, Italians are not disgusted when served a whole fish, something that is often perceived as repulsive in the United States. Not everybody is actually able and willing to debone the fish; in restaurants, waiters usually do it for the patrons. In some areas, fish roe is eaten. The most famous is dried mullet roe, or *bottarga*, from Sardinia, often grated on pasta.

Cooking methods are similar to the rest of the Mediterranean: Fish can be grilled, roasted in the oven (often with herbs, lemon, and potatoes), boiled, stewed, sautéed, fried, steamed, or cooked in aluminum foil (this method is called *al cartoccio*). A more unusual method is called *carpinatura* or *saor*: The fish is covered in flour and fried, and then it is left to marinate in vinegar and various herbs for at least one day.

Different cooking methods have been elaborated to prepare stockfish (*stoccafisso*, codfish dried by hanging in the cold air) and salted dried cod-fish (*baccalà*), extremely popular although not a Mediterranean fish. Both require soaking in water to lose all of the extra salt. When fresh fish was hard to get, these dried products offered a convenient and relatively cheap solution, especially in times when the liturgical calendar required one to avoid meat. They were also extremely important as food for sailors, during long journeys; ironically, many recipes originated in seaports, where one would expect that the sailors, back from a long trip, would hate to see on their table the same cod they ate for long months out at sea. In Liguria, stockfish is stewed with olive oil, garlic, onions, anchovies, diced tomatoes, diced potatoes, olives, and pine nuts (*stocche accumudou*); it is also boiled in small pieces and then beaten into a smooth paste together with potatoes, tomatoes, onions, lemon juice, and spices (*stoccafisso mantecato*). A similar recipe is found in Venice, where *baccalà* can also be boiled and beaten, with the addition of olive oil, till it has the same texture as whipped cream (*baccalà mantecato*); in Trieste milk and fresh chopped parley are added to this recipe. Another famous *baccalà* recipe is found in another Veneto city, Vicenza: It is *baccalà alla vicentina*, in which the fish

is stuffed with chopped parsley, anchovies, and garlic and then cut into pieces, covered in flour mixed with grated cheese, and sautéed in a pan with milk and olive oil. Further south, in Florence, we find *baccalà alla fiorentina*: Pieces of the fish are cut, covered in flour, and sautéed with tomato sauce. In Livorno, on the coast of Tuscany, stockfish is used instead of *baccalà*, and celery, basil, and parsley are added to the tomato sauce. A similar recipe is found in Calabria, where it is called *piscistuccu a ghiotta*.

Crustaceans, shellfish, and all kinds of mollusks are appreciated all over Italy. Along the southern coasts, many of them, such as mussels (*cozza*) and sea urchins (*riccio di mare*), are eaten raw, with a little lemon freshly squeezed on them, just as in the rest of Europe, where consumers prefer oysters. Besides mussels, the most common shellfish are clams (*vongole*), cockles (*tartufo*), telleens (*telline*), scallops (*capesante*), and razor clams (*cannolicchi*).

Sea and land snails are appreciated all over the country. Land snails need to be fed wheat bran and vegetables for a few days before cooking to clean their innards. They can be prepared in many different ways: stewed in tomato sauce with the shell, shelled and sautéed, or shelled and fried.

Sea shellfish are usually sautéed with garlic, olive oil, and fresh chopped parsley, stewed with tomato or wine, or more often just baked in the oven with bread crumbs, garlic, and other herbs. They are also a popular condiment for pasta, especially spaghetti. Spaghetti with clams or mussels are an absolute classic, flavorful and easy to make, but quite different from the heavily creamed versions that are served in many Italian restaurants in the United States. Cooks add shrimp, squid, and sometimes octopus to make the pasta even tastier. This recipe is called *spaghetti allo scoglio*, or *al cartoccio* when pasta is cooked in aluminum foil together with the seafood.



Clam and mussel shells.

The same mollusks are simply boiled and then served cold in salads (sea salads, *insalata di mare*), with fresh parsley, black olives, and sometimes fresh tomato.

Squid and calamari are often added to soups, but they are well loved when covered in egg and bread crumbs and fried. Squid can also be stewed, together with peas, and stuffed (in this case it is usually sautéed or grilled). In Florence, it is served with chard in the famous *inzimino*. The ink is used to make pasta, risotto, or to cook the squid itself. Less common and more expensive, octopus is grilled or boiled and served in cold salads.

Shrimp are probably the most popular of all crustaceans, also due to their reasonable price. Prawns, lobsters, and crabs are definitely more expensive and found mainly in restaurants. These crustaceans are usually served simply boiled, whole (with fresh lemon or a light mayonnaise) or cut in pieces in a salad. More rarely, they are cut along the length and grilled or cooked with tomato sauce to season pasta. A curiosity from Venice are *moleche*, tiny soft-shell crabs, that are left to soak in beaten eggs—still alive—for a few hours and then covered in flour and fried.<sup>15</sup>

Frogs used to be popular in areas with lakes or marshes. Thighs were especially considered a delicacy. Nowadays they are much harder to find because of the pollution of freshwater sources all over the country.

#### Swordfish with Capers, Black Olives, and Tomatoes

- 1 1/2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 swordfish steaks, 1/2 inch thick
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 3 tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped
- 1 tablespoon capers, rinsed and drained
- 2 tablespoons black olives, chopped
- 2 tablespoon sun-dried tomatoes, soaked and chopped
- 1 tablespoon minced parsley
- salt
- pepper

Heat the olive oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Place the swordfish steaks in the skillet and season with salt and pepper. Cook the steaks for 3 minutes on each side. Add the white wine. When it has evaporated, reduce the heat and top each steak with a mix of fresh tomatoes, sun-dried tomatoes, capers, and black olives. Cook over low heat for 2 minutes longer. Place the steaks on a serving platter and sprinkle with the chopped parsley. Serve warm.

### COFFEE, TEA, AND TISANES

Several drinks made by infusion or decoction of leaves, grains, or roots in boiling water are commonly enjoyed in Italy. Beyond any doubt, the most common is coffee. The most appreciated kind is the *arabica*, with a rich aroma and a low caffeine content (1.1 to 1.7 percent), more expensive than the variety *robusta*, which is less aromatic and has a higher caffeine content (2 to 4.5 percent). Despite its density, Italian coffee often contains less caffeine than American coffee. Besides being drunk in much smaller quantities, the roasting process is longer than in other parts of the world, lowering the caffeine content but increasing the bitterness. In southern Italy, coffee is usually roasted longer than in the north. See chapter 4, "Typical Meals," for more information about the use of coffee.

Tea is a recent addition to the Italian diet, adopted at the end of the nineteenth century following the example of Great Britain. Most people use ready-made blended ground tea in bags. Only connoisseurs are familiar with different kinds of tea, their provenance, and their aroma and use a teapot to prepare the beverage. Tea is usually consumed with sugar and a slice of lemon in it. Very few enjoy it with sugar and milk, as the British do. Even fewer use the whole leaves in infusion, as the Chinese do. Other



Stove-top coffeemaker.

infusions, such as chamomile tea, linden, mint, and verbena, which are appreciated for their calming effect, are also popular.

## CHOCOLATE

Chocolate is very popular in Italy.<sup>16</sup> In pastry making, cocoa powder is added to dough in many preparations for cakes and cookies. It is also used to prepare fillings, creams, and custards. It is commonly served mixed with hot milk, often topped with sweetened whipped cream (*cioccolata calda*). Chocolate is often consumed in the form of small, flat slabs (*tavoletta di cioccolato*) and as *cioccolatini*, small candies often filled with creams or liquors. *Cioccolatini* can be both artisanal and mass-produced. Various ingredients can be added to cocoa. For instance, in Piedmont, hazelnuts, the most common nuts in the area, are finely ground in the *cioccolatini* called *giandujotti* or added whole to chocolate bars (*cioccolato alle nocciole*).

In the past few years, a growing interest in rare cocoa beans has become a fashion. Some small semi-artisanal companies make chocolate by grinding selected beans from a single, high-quality variety, with concentrations varying from 50 to 70 percent. These products are usually labeled as bitter chocolate (*cioccolato amaro*) and contain little milk, as opposed to other chocolates with higher milk content (*cioccolato al latte*). Purists condemn the replacement of cocoa butter with other cheaper ingredients, often used by large food industries. It is now mandatory for producers to indicate the fat substances used to make chocolate.

## NOTES

1. Franco La Cecla, *La pasta e la pizza* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998); Françoise Sabban and Serventi Silvano, *La pasta* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2000).
2. Slow Food, *Ricette di sua maestà il raviolo* (Bra: Slow Food Editore, 1993).
3. Giovanni Goria, *La cucina del Piemonte* (Padova: Franco Muzzio, 1990).
4. Slow Food, *Ricette di osterie dell'Abruzzo: panarde, guazzetti e virtù* (Bra: Slow Food Editore, 1997).
5. Jeanne Carola Francesciani, *La cucina Napoletana* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1992).
6. Paolo Lingua, *La cucina dei genovesi* (Padova: Franco Muzzio, 1989).
7. Flavio Birri and Coco Carla, *Cade a Fagiolo* (Venice: Marsilio, 2000).
8. Riccardo Di Corato, *838 frutti e verdure d'Italia* (Milan: Sonzogno, 1984).
9. Vito Teti, *Il peperoncino: Un americano nel Mediterraneo* (Vibo Valentia: Monteleone, 1995).
10. Salvatore Gelsi, *Zucca e tortelli* (Mantova: Edizioni Tre Lune, 1998).

11. Mario da Passano, Antonello Mattone, Franca Mele, and Pinuccia Simbula, *La vite e il vino: storia e diritto, secoli XI-XIX* (Rome: Carocci, 2000).
12. Zeffiro Bocci, *L'evoluzione del settore vitivinicolo negli ultimi trent'anni* (Verona: Gruppo Italiano Vini, 1997).
13. Livio Jannattoni, *La cucina romana e del Lazio* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1998).
14. Piero Camporesi, *Le vie del latte, dalla Padania alla steppa* (Milan: Garzanti, 1993).
15. Giuseppe Maffioli, *La cucina veneziana* (Padova: Franco Muzzio, 1982).
16. Tiziana Plebani, *Cioccolata: la bevanda degli dei forestieri* (Venice: Centro Internazionale della Grafica, 1991).