

Nonna's Kitchen

Finding Nonna's Recipes Online



By Laura D'Amelio

Of the many things that older Italian-Canadians leave behind for the next generations, including traditions, namesakes and memories, one thing they often don't leave behind is written down recipes of your favourite dishes and desserts.

Second and third generation Italian-Canadians suffer from a lack of scrawled measurements and smudged notes that hold the secret recipes of a small Italian village and what made Nonna's kitchen smell so good. The recipes are by rote, travelling with them from Italy to Montreal or Woodbridge, and measurements are by gesture only.

"The food world, like much of our planet, is changing rapidly and with our society having seemingly no borders, food cultures and recipes are being integrated with other food traditions. Italian food is no exception, and once a particular recipe leaves a tiny village in southern Italy in Calabria, for example, it will change forever,"

says Vincent Scordo, who runs Scordo.com, a website dedicated to Italian heritage and food. "Scordo.com is really an effort to preserve and document how to live like an Italian in the US and, in turn, keep our Italian heritage strong. And since food is so strongly associated with Italian culture and life, documenting our family recipes online was a natural extension."

People who record Nonna's methods, like Scordo, now find their recipes in demand. When wanting to recapture their food memories, later generations find themselves scrambling to put together names and ingredients to replicate their Nonni's kitchen magic. The business of looking for long-lost recipes has found a home online where traditional



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recipes are recorded and requested daily, and particularly around the holidays.

In some cases, it's not just Italian generations keeping the recipes alive. Sandra Laux started Mangiabepasta.com in 2001 in her retirement to share her knowledge of making pasta gathered from extended Italian family and friends. Within a year, her site started to become popular.

Soon she began receiving emails from readers happy to find recipes their mothers used to make. "It was always a variation of the same lament that their ancestors had passed on, and the recipes were never written down or had been lost. I had so many recipes to share and I was actually connecting with people, bringing a bit of joy into their lives and preserving these wonderful Italian recipes for generations to come," says Laux.

"Probably my favourite story was from a young woman ... She said that her grandmother had described a cake to her that she used to have on her birthdays when she was a little girl, but she didn't know the name of it. She had searched a number of websites looking for the right recipe. She thought that our Italian Rum Cake might be it, so she made it for her grandmother's birthday. She wrote that her grandmother couldn't have been more surprised that it was exactly how she had remembered it," says Laux.

Gabriel Riel-Salvatore, Managing Editor at Panoram Italia Magazine, says his readers request dessert and cookie recipes the most, as they are associated with holidays and special events where the treats were front and centre. "The number of visits on our Italian Recipe Index this past December was just crazy. People just love discovering new cookie recipes." Laux and Scordo both agree.

Often online photo searches can help to identify the exact cookie or cake they remember from their youth. "Having good visual content is very important," argues Riel-Salvatore. "It really helps people find what they are looking for." "The problem people have in locating most recipes is the way they remember the name of the dish

as it was spoken rather than how it is actually written. In addition, one recipe may have numerous names for it throughout Italy," says Laux.

Starting the search for an old family recipe may be frustrating at first when Google yields very few results for Italian dialect names. Along with Scordo.com and Mangiabepasta.com, finding sites that specialize in Italian immigrant recipes is the key to success. Italian-Canadian author Mary Melfi created www.italyrevisited.org where, along with documenting Italian cultural heritage, she painstakingly categorizes traditional Italian recipes by region and type, noting the "occasion" it was usually made during, whether "anytime" or "Easter," for example. Sites like Panoram Italia's recipe archive or Italian-Canadian food personality David Rocco's own online recipe collection are also good places to start searching.

Collaborative online projects, with contributors from around the world, are building up recipe stores like a well-stocked cantina as well. Panoram Italia encourages viewers to submit their old recipes, even just as scans of old scrawled notes, to be archived and available for everyone to view and access. Panoram Italia's recipe index, at panoramitalia.com/en/food-wine/recipes, is full of recipe requests from users looking for long-lost recipes. Riel-Salvatore adds, "Italian recipes are often quick and easy. We have tons of rapid recipes on our website that are perfect for people with tight schedules or people that simply love to eat Italian."

If you are searching for an old family recipe, Scordo says the search should start in your own family. "If the family is mostly first generation then it's a good bet someone in the family will accurately remember Nonna's recipe. If the Italian family originally came to the US [or Canada] in the early 20th century then maybe Nonna's recipe will best be found by starting with a good Italian cookbook and narrowing down the type of dish. Maybe thereafter they can search online and reference a good blog or two."

Teasers

Pasta alla Norma
panoramitalia.com



Broccoli Cavatelli
Mangiabepasta.com



Mussels in Spicy
Tomato Sauce
Scordo.com



Pane Rustica
with 3 cheeses
italyrevisited.org



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