

Stinging Nettle Ricotta Gnocchi

Stinging Nettles are available at Farmer's Markets if you don't have them growing where you live. Be careful, they really do sting if you don't wear gloves when handling them in their raw state. When I made this the first time I just used butter & cheese for the "sauce" but the second time I made a creamy tomato basil sauce that worked really well with the gnocchi.

Makes 24 large Gnocchi (3 or 4 per serving)

1 lb. fresh nettles, stems removed, washed, blanched, squeezed dry**
15 oz. ricotta cheese, drained**
3 large eggs, lightly beaten
1/3 cup freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano or Grana Padano + more for baking if using
1/2 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
Approx. 2 cups unbleached flour
1/4 tsp. sea salt
1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
2 – 3 Tbsp. unsalted butter + more for greasing baking dish
1 Tbsp. salt

Chop the nettles very finely with a chef's knife. Do not use a processor as it will produce too much liquid. Squeeze the chopped nettles to remove excess moisture; place the nettles in a large mixing bowl.

Add the ricotta, eggs, Parmigiano, nutmeg, salt & pepper; mix well. Start adding small amounts of flour, 4 or 5 Tbsp. at a time. The mixture should be soft, but not wet. If necessary, add a little more flour, in small amounts, as needed (the less flour added, the lighter the gnocchi). It depends on the amount of moisture in the nettles.

Preheat the oven to 375 F & generously butter an ovenproof serving dish into which the gnocchi can be placed in one layer. Set aside.

Sprinkle a work surface with flour. Form little croquette-shaped (ovals) dumplings, about 2" long & roll them in a bit of the flour. Set aside on a rimmed baking sheet until all are finished. Do not handle too much as the gnocchi won't be as light as they should be.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil & add the 1 Tbsp. salt. When the water comes back to a boil, drop in 1/3 of the gnocchi. Boil until they float to the top. Cook until firm, 3 – 4 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon, to a colander & let drain for a minute, then transfer to the greased baking dish. Continue cooling the remaining gnocchi in the same way. Dot the gnocchi with the butter & place in the oven, baking for about 10 minutes. Sprinkle with more cheese & continue baking for another 5 minutes or so until golden.

OR: dot the gnocchi with butter, bake for 15 minutes or so & serve immediately with Tomato-Basil sauce.

****To see about working with stinging nettles, please go to Blanching Vegetables.**

****I highly recommend using Scardillo Genuina Ricotta (available at Costco on Still Creek Rd.) It has a much better texture and is not watery. Simply place the ricotta into a fine-meshed sieve & let drain over a bowl for an hour before making the gnocchi. You probably won't get very much liquid but it should be done regardless.**

Tomato Basil Sauce

1 – 28 oz. tin Italian plum tomatoes, crushed using your hands (do not use already crushed tinned tomatoes, they are far too thick for this sauce)

4 Tbsp. EVO
1/2 cup finely chopped onion

1 large clove garlic, minced
6 - 8 large fresh basil leaves
¼ cup whipping cream

Heat the EVO in a large sauté pan over medium heat, until hot but not smoking, add the onions & sauté until softened, approximately 5 minutes; add the garlic & sauté for another minute. Add the crushed tomatoes, bring up to the boil & simmer for about 20 minutes or until thickened. Tear the basil leaves into pieces & add to the tomato sauce along with the cream, simmer for a few minutes & serve over the gnocchi.