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A Worldwide Vegetarian Journey to Discover the Foods That Nourish America's Immigrant Soul.

May 2018

TORTELLINI

Oven-Roasted Brussels Sprouts, Shallots, and

Tortellini

Rustic Italian
Baked *Tortellini* and
Greens Skillet



Tortellini and Artichoke Hearts *Alfredo*

Herbed Italian Seasoning Mix

Tortellini with Carrots and *Gorgonzola*

Tortellini Soup with *Chouriço* Sausages

There are many stories about how and where *tortellini* were invented. The legends range from recreations of Lucrezia Borgia's navel by an innkeeper in Castelfrano, Emilia, to the representation of Venus' umbilical connection, again by an innkeeper who claimed to have witnessed a night of lovemaking between Venus and Jupiter. These stories led to an alternate name, *ombellico* or belly button. Modena also takes credit claiming that the twisted, stuffed *pasta* is really a turtle, celebrating the turtle designs frequently seen in Modena architecture. This imagery completely escapes me . . . You may also find these dumplings called *cappellacci*, "little hats." It appears that others just don't buy the navel imagery.

Altering the shape of common foods helps make cooking preparation more creative and helps make the presentation of common ingredients more interesting. We have all sliced and twisted and combined these distortions for "presentation" so I'm dubious that any cook worth his or her creative salt needed Lucretia or Venus to inspire a twist in the *pasta* to keep the filling from falling out of a dumpling when boiled. Some shopkeeper somewhere in Emilia-Romagna sold enough of the twisted *pasta* product to start a trend that spread to a demand, and this fad just never ended.



A *torta* (pl. *tortelli*) filled with cheese, meat, and/or vegetables and easy to carry to the fields or to the battlefield, was an innovation of necessity. This unique culinary invention actually is a result of the often overlooked creativity of the Dark Ages in much the same vein as is the meat pie of the British Isles which also has survived the centuries.

When we were in high school and even into our college years, homemakers in metropolitan areas still traveled daily to the meat market, the cheese store, the bakery for fresh-baked bread and pastries, and the Italian grocery where homemade filled pastry, or *paste ripiene*, like *tortellini* and *ravioli* could be purchased freshly made. I am glad to see that refrigerated *ravioli*, *tortellini*, the larger *tortelloni*, stuffed shells, stuffed *cannellini*, and *manicotti* are available in the deli section of most large grocery stores. All are also available frozen and the wonderful *tortellini* is now conveniently available dried. The dried *tortellini* are a useful addition to my pantry as meal insurance; they are just perfect for soups and vegetable dishes.



Tortellini can make a salad a spectacular and nutritious main-course. I am infinitely content if they are simply

Tortellini can make a salad a spectacular and nutritious main-course. I am infinitely content if they are simply boiled and served in the style of Piemonte with *burro fuso e salvia* (browned sage butter) and grated *pecorino Romano*. Skillet dinners can be more interesting with *tortellini* as in the rustic skillet I have included here. A canned soup with the addition of *tortellini* can fill your bowl requiring only a salad to satisfy. The *tortellini* soup with soy *chouriço* sausages below is a perfect example. It is quickly assembled using “good-for-you” convenience items, a subject we addressed in February.



OVEN-ROASTED BRUSSELS SPROUTS AND *TORTELLINI* WITH SHALLOTS AND LEMON SLICES

TPT - 26 minutes

Every fall, after the first frost, one can find whole stalks of Brussels sprouts at our farmers' market and in the several large grocery stores that we frequent here in farm country. When we lived on the East Coast, I would occasionally find farm-packed pint containers of fresh Brussels sprouts but generally I had to settle for frozen poly bags. The tiny sprouts at the top of the stalk are so sweet and so tender that you want to eat them right off the stalk. These are the sprouts that I use to make this dish. The larger sprouts are stronger in taste and are usually shredded for salads or frittatas or sautéed as a green side.

24 tiny fresh Brussels sprouts—trimmed, outer leaves removed, well-rinsed, and halved
3 large shallot cloves—cut into thick slices
1 organic lemon—well-washed and sliced*
1 1/2 tablespoons high heat safflower or sunflower oil
Salt, to taste

2 quarts boiling water
24 small, dried cheese *tortellini*

1/4 cup canned, diced tomatoes

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Grated 7 cheese

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F.

In a roasting pan, combine Brussels sprout halves, shallot slices, and lemon slices. Pour oil over. Stir to coat vegetables uniformly. Sprinkle with salt. Again, mix well. Roast in preheated 325 degree F. oven, stirring frequently, until browned.

Meanwhile, cook *tortellini* in boiling water over *MEDIUM* heat according to package directions but deduct 3 minutes from the cooking period directed. Drain.

When Brussels sprouts and shallots have browned, add cooked *tortellini*, and diced tomato. Continue roasting and stirring until tomato bits begin to dry and *tortellini* begin to brown. Turn into a heated serving bowl.

Grind black pepper generously over.

Serve at once with grated cheese,

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Serve at once with grated cheese,

Yields 3 servings
adequate for 2 people

Notes: *Citrus fruits are routinely sprayed with fungicides. If you choose organic citrus fruits for dishes that require zest or peel, you are less likely to ingest residual fungicides.

This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/3 SERVING (exclusive of grated cheese) –
PROTEIN = 7.5 g.; FAT = 10.8 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 25.4 g.;
CALORIES = 223; CALORIES FROM FAT = 44%

RUSTIC ITALIAN BAKED *TORTELLINI* AND GREENS SKILLET *Tortellini e Verdura Verde al Forno*

TPT - 40 minutes

This bit of Italian comfort food is made all the more comforting to the cook's schedule when it can be made with readily-available dried or refrigerated tortellini. I used to make my own tortellini; then I found an Italian deli that made the tortellini fresh every day; now I just pick up tortellini at any grocery store. Direct-from-the-skillet comfort dishes are even more comforting. Imagine yourselves nestled into a corner table in a small restaurant in the Italian Alps . . . It will taste even better.

2 ounces dried cheese or cheese and spinach

tortellini

2 quarts boiling water

2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil

1/2 cup finely chopped onion

1 1/2 cups canned, diced tomatoes

2 tablespoons chopped sulfite-free sun-dried

tomatoes

1 cup baby spinach—trimmed and well-rinsed

1 cup chopped escarole—well-rinsed

1/2 teaspoon crushed, dry oregano

1/4 teaspoon crushed, dry thyme

**Freshly ground mixed peppercorns—red, white,
and black—to taste**

1/2 cup small mozzarella balls (pearls)



In a saucepan set over *MEDIUM* heat, cook *tortellini* in *boiling* water according to package directions. Drain.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

In an oven-proof skillet, heat oil. Add *finely* chopped onion. Sauté until onion is soft and translucent, *being careful not to allow onion to brown*.

Add diced tomatoes, chopped sun-dried tomatoes, spinach, chopped escarole, and crushed, dried oregano and thyme. Cook, stirring constantly, until greens are wilted.

Add *mozzarella* balls and cooked *tortellini*. Stir to immerse the cheese and the *tortellini* in the sauce. Slide into preheated 350 degree F. oven for about 8 minutes, until heated through and cheese is melting.



Serve directly from the skillet.

Yields 4 servings

Notes: This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 9.3 g.; FAT = 10.1 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 19.2 g.;
CALORIES = 211; CALORIES FROM FAT = 43%



TORTELLINI AND ARTICHOKE HEARTS ALFREDO *Tortellini e Cuori di Carciofo Alfredo*

TPT - 27 minutes

Sometimes dinner has to get on the table quickly. I often turn this dish when time is my challenge. The preparation time is a real plus but the taste is the big selling point. Steamed or boiled whole carrots with butter and freshly grated black pepper, which can be prepared at the same time, are the perfect accompaniment. Tortellini in the pantry; artichoke hearts in the freezer; cream, grated cheese, and carrots in the refrigerator . . . go . . . go . . . go . . . enjoy.

2 quarts boiling water
20 dried cheese tortellini

1/4 cup light cream or half and half
2 tablespoons grated pecorino Romano cheese

1 tablespoon butter
1/2 teaspoon HERBED ITALIAN SEASONING
MIX (*Miscuglio di Erbas Italiano*) [see recipe
which follows]

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 cup frozen artichoke hearts



In a saucepan set over *MEDIUM-HIGH* heat, boil *tortellini* in *boiling* water according to package directions. Drain. Reduce heat to *LOW*. Return cooked *tortellini* to the saucepan.

Add cream and grated cheese. Stir to combine and *stir frequently while preparing artichoke hearts*.

In a small skillet set over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat, melt butter. Add seasoning mixture and black pepper. Stir to combine. Add artichoke hearts. Cook, stirring frequently, until artichoke hearts are heated through and begin to brown. Turn artichoke hearts, butter, and seasoning into saucepan with *tortellini*, cream, and cheese. Stir to combine. Turn into heated serving bowl.



Serve at once.

Yields 4 servings
adequate for 2 people

Note: This recipe can be halved or doubled, when required.

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1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 4.4 g.; FAT = 7.1 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 12.0 g.;
CALORIES = 131; CALORIES FROM FAT = 49%

HERBED ITALIAN SEASONING MIX

Miscuglio di Erbas Italiano

TPT - 3 minutes

You will find yourself grabbing a pinch of this mixture so often, your fingers will be permanently, and delightfully, seasoned! It is a super addition to melted butter or a plain tomato sauce to dress vegetables, pasta, or whatever. We also use this as a dry marinade for outdoor grilling or oven roasting.

2 teaspoons crushed, dried oregano—either

Greek or Italian oregano, as preferred

2 teaspoons crushed, dried basil

2 teaspoons crushed, dried parsley

2 teaspoons crushed, dried thyme

2 teaspoons crushed, dried rosemary

2 teaspoons crushed, dried sage

2 teaspoons garlic powder

1/8 teaspoon ground red pepper (cayenne), or to taste

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, or to taste

In a SEED or COFFEE GRINDER, or in a mortar, combine dried oregano, basil, parsley, thyme, rosemary, sage, garlic powder, ground red pepper (cayenne), and black pepper. Grind herbs to a uniform mixture.

Turn into a small jelly or spice jar.* Cover tightly and shake to mix thoroughly. Store in a cool, dark place.

Yields about 14 teaspoonfuls

Notes: *Choose a small jar because the smaller the jar, the less air will come in contact with the herbs, and the longer the mix will keep its flavor.

This recipe can be halved and that is often a good idea since the flavor dissipates considerably due to the release of the volatile oils with crushing. It is advisable to replace the seasoning combination after about 3 months.

FOOD VALUES for such herb mixtures are almost negligible.

TORTELLINI WITH CARROTS AND GORGONZOLA

Tortellini con Carotas e Gorgonzola

TPT - 21 minutes

I evolved this one evening in early March. It had been an extremely mild winter and we were so anticipatory of spring. Garden chores had begun and the list of additions to the herb garden was growing. This dish, which frankly just happened, was such a cheerful centerpiece for the meal that I felt it should be recorded and shared.

1 quart boiling water

2 medium carrots—scraped or pared and diced

2 quarts boiling water

18 dried or fresh cheese tortellini

1 1/2 tablespoons finely chopped parsley

1 1/2 teaspoons butter

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 tablespoon crumbled Gorgonzola cheese



In a saucepan set over MEDIUM heat cook diced carrots in the 1 quartful boiling water until tender. Drain thoroughly.

1 tablespoon crumbled *Gorgonzola* cheese

In a saucepan set over *MEDIUM* heat cook diced carrots in the 1 quartful *boiling* water until tender. Drain thoroughly.

At the same time, in another saucepan set over *MEDIUM-HIGH* heat, cook the *tortellini* in the 2 quartfuls *boiling* water according to package directions. Drain thoroughly. Return to saucepan set over *LOW* heat.

Add cooked and drained diced carrots, *finely* chopped parsley, butter, and black pepper. Stir until butter is melted and the mixture is heated through. Turn into a heated serving bowl.

Sprinkle crumbled *Gorgonzola* cheese over.

Serve at once.

Yields 2 servings
adequate for 2 people

Note: This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/2 SERVING – PROTEIN = 3.3 g.; FAT = 6.3 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 11.4 g.;
CALORIES = 115; CALORIES FROM FAT = 49%

TORTELLINI SOUP WITH CHOURIÇO SAUSAGES
Minestra del Tortellini e Salsiccia

TPT - 29 minutes

The convenience of dried tortellini and frozen soy sausages to the vegetarian cook can not be underestimated. It was not so when I first began to cook for a family. Either you made the tortellini yourself or you obtained them from an Italian deli or pasta store provided you lived in a big city with a large Italian population. Soy meat analogue products like chouriço sausages were not available then. In fact, I did not start using them until we moved to Pennsylvania in 1995. This is a hearty main-course soup that warms the soul and begs for large chunks of a good, hard-cruste, rustic loaf of Italian bread.

1/2 can (7 1/2 ounces) low-sodium vegetarian minestrone soup*

1 cup vegetarian stock of choice
2 tablespoons red wine

1 1/2 ounces dried *tortellini* with *porcini* mushrooms
1 frozen vegetarian *chouriço* (*chorizo*) sausage—sliced
1/8 teaspoon crushed dried thyme
1/8 teaspoon crushed dried oregano or marjoram,
as preferred
Pinch rosemary powder



Grated *pecorino Romano* cheese

In a food processor, fitted with steel knife, or electric blender, process *minestrone* soup into a uniform liquid. Turn into a small kettle set over *MEDIUM* heat.

Add stock and allow to come to the boil.

Add *tortellini*, *chouriço* slices, crushed dried thyme and oregano, and rosemary powder. Cook, stirring occasionally for about 12 minutes. Divide between two heated soup plates.

Serve at once. Pass grated cheese.

Yields 2 servings

Notes: *Beware some canned *minestrone* soups inexplicably contain added beef or chicken stock.

This recipe can be doubled, when required.

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1/2 SERVING (exclusive of grated cheese) –

PROTEIN = 11.0 g.; FAT = 8.0 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 22.0 g.;

CALORIES = 206; CALORIES FROM FAT = 35%

*The simple British export, macaroni and cheese,
now runs the risk of losing its true comfort value for the sake of convenience.*

*Mac and cheese, in all its incarnations, is an easy concept
so easy that we now allow boxed and frozen versions to move in and take over.*

*Next month we will look at a variety of easy dishes from around the world
that could actually be labeled “mac and cheese.” Do stop by,*

Judy

Please note that all food value calculations are approximate and not the result of chemical analysis.

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