

By Tim Hoey

# Hearty, Healthy Fare As Winter Turns to Spring



This time of year, with its swing between winter and spring, builds up appetites and reasons to prepare good food. Depending upon your mood and the weather, you can make slow-cooking, hearty dishes or try a recipe with lighter ingredients. The challenge is to choose healthy dishes that parallel the season's capricious conditions.

Italian cuisine provides many ways to create exciting meals that are also good for you. Its approach incorporates culinary precepts refined over centuries of experience. They include using organic ingredients whenever possible, combining them in sensible, harmonious ways, and cooking them with skill, respect, and love.

We recently talked with Tony Grande at Il Capriccio about this season's delicious Italian dishes, their connection to healthy lifestyles, and their preparation.

Tim: I like going into spring eating in a healthy way. You've pointed out a healthier life starts with smart choices about the meat, vegetables, and other products we intend to cook.

Tony: Yes, that's a necessary first step, and one consistent with an Italian cooking style. A healthy life begins with eating chemical-free food.

Tim: Healthy products, such as organically grown foods, are now much more available than ever before.

Tony: A lot of people are aware these days about organic food. When you shop, at the very least you should look for a guarantee from the grower or provider that the item was FDA-certified as organic.

Tim: That's just as true with meat as with vegetables.

Tony: Finding natural, organically-raised meat is essential for good tasting food and your health. To find it, shop at a local butcher or specialty store you trust. You want assurance that the meat came from animals free from hormones, steroids, and antibiotics. That's especially important for my costoletta di vitello forestiera dish, which requires high-quality meat.



Tim: Speaking as a home cook, I liked your veal dish's lightness and versatility.

Tony: One of the advantages of veal is that you can have it at any time of year. It's a dish that can bridge the winter and the spring. And it's one of the lightest, finest dishes in Italian cooking. The dish is made from the finest, most expensive cut of veal, but it's worth the extra cost. Also, if at all possible, try to purchase milk-fed veal, which is very tender.

Tim: I was struck by your use of sage. In this country, it's often associated with Thanksgiving turkey stuffing. Veal is lighter than turkey, yet the sage works wonderfully in your recipe.

Tony: Sage harmonizes with the meat's delicate flavor. The herb has a deep, but not overpowering taste that gives my veal dish an elegant touch.

Tim: Nowadays, freshly grown sage leaves are readily available in supermarkets.

Tony: People should use fresh rather than dried sage. They should also try to grow their own. While sage is typically grown in areas with a mild climate, it can be grown here. However, it is a finicky plant. Sage only grows where you have perfect temperatures. To be successful, you have to protect sage plants from the wind. If the plant gets southern exposure, and is protected by a stone or brick wall, you should be able to successfully grow your own.

Tim: Can you offer some tips to help home cooks prepare costoletta di vitello forestiera?

Tony: Sure. First, have the butcher cut the meat and trim it. You want him doing that work.

Tim: Any suggestions regarding stovetop technique?

Tony: Yes. Don't ever use a fork to turn the meat; you'll lose juices when you puncture the veal. Use tongs or a spatula to turn the meat. Above all, do not overcook the veal. At the precise moment it's ready – what in Italian is called a punto giusto – take it out of the pan. Timing is very important in this dish.

Tim: Thanks, Tony. We look forward to making costoletta di vitello forestiera! ▲

Tony Grande, Chef/Owner, Il Capriccio

## Costoletta di Vitello Forestiera Veal "Forestiera" Style

Serves four

### INGREDIENTS:

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Four 12-to-14 oz. pieces of center cut rack of naturally raised veal, cut and trimmed into one inch thick pieces. | 2 oz. chopped pancetta               |
| One medium white onion, cut into 1/16" slices   | 2 oz. dry white wine                 |
| 4 oz. oyster mushrooms, cut in half   | 4 fresh, chopped sage leaves         |
| 2 oz. fresh or frozen porcini mushrooms, cut into 1/16" slices  | 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil |
|   | 1 tablespoon butter                  |
|   | salt & pepper to taste               |
|   | 4 oz. chicken stock                  |
|   | 4 oz. all-purpose flour              |

### PREPARING THE DISH:

Preheat the oven to 575-595 degrees. Place an ovenproof skillet on the stovetop, add the extra virgin olive oil, and bring it to a high heat. Meanwhile, dredge the veal in the flour. Knock off excess flour, then place the pieces in the pan. Cook both sides so that the veal reaches a golden color. After that, add pancetta and cook for 3 or 4 minutes, until the pancetta is golden. Then add both types of mushrooms, sage, salt, and pepper, and braise for another four minutes. Pour the wine into the pan and let it evaporate, about 2 or 3 minutes. Add the chicken broth, briefly mix the ingredients well, and then place the uncovered skillet in the oven. Cook for 15 minutes. When finished, remove from the oven, place butter in the pan, mix well, and serve the veal immediately. Garnish with a potato puree, roasted potatoes, or your favorite vegetable.

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