

Cooking with Tony

By Tim Hoey, Photos by David Verdini



Relish a Relaxed Summer Meal—

Italian Style

In early summer, a bit of the Italian spirit in all of us emerges. Through activities such as backyard gardening and comfortable, relaxed dining, we intuitively connect with the season's harmonious atmosphere and sense of renewal. And early summer's lighter recipes provide a marvelous vehicle to savor this *gioia di vivere*, Italian style.

Sharing our enthusiasm for early summer, Chef Tony Grande of Il Capriccio recently talked about delicious dishes that capture this season's celebratory spirit.

Tim: What foods do you associate with early summer?

Tony: Well, in Italy, we're close to nature, regardless of the region where one lives. We're in touch with its eternal rhythms and enjoy its bounty. In Italy, at this time of year, that bounty includes veal.

Tim: Why is veal connected with early summer?

Tony: Veal is meat from a mild-fed calf about six months old. For top quality veal, the animals must eat grass, as it gives the cow's milk and the calf's meat its flavor. Fresh spring grass is the best food; its quality makes a big difference in the veal's taste.

Tim: So veal would be at the peak of flavor in early summer?

Tony: Exactly. And that's why Italians make a point of preparing veal dishes at this time of year, because it's one of the lightest, most delicate meats.

Tim: Does grass affect the veal's color?

Tony: Yes. Grass gives the veal a light pink color, rather than white. Pinker veal has much more flavor.

Tim: Is there a preferred way to cook veal?

Tony: Yes. In my veal recipe, it's important to thoroughly cook the meat so that the veal is tender to the fork. In general, cooking time depends on the cut of the veal. A couple of guidelines are helpful. First, unlike red meat, veal should never be served rare. Also, you should never overcook veal, as that eliminates the meat's juices. Once veal is dry, it's a loss. Cooked veal that has a light pink color is best.

Tim: Most of us are familiar with veal chops, loin, and cuts suitable for scallopine.

Tony: The so-called secondary cuts offer excellent value, and are delicious in their own right. *Bocconcini di vitello al vino bianco* (see recipe) is an excellent example. It's a dish that home cooks can easily prepare and enjoy. *Bocconcini* is a stew-like dish whose slow cooking approach is consistent with the season's relaxed mood.

Tim: You suggest serving it with zucchini salad—an intriguing pairing.

Tony: Zucchini salad offers a contemporary touch you typically don't see on menus around here, and it's a crunchy salad appropriate for the summer.

Tim: Sometimes our notion of Italian cuisine doesn't encourage culinary innovation.

Tony: Well, that approach is not reflective of how Italians are cooking and eating now. You know, even Italian food changes, and takes on new ideas. Now, the concept and ingredients for zucchini salad have always been available, but they never crossed the ocean so quickly.

Tim: Why is it emerging now?

Tony: Italians—all of us, really—are all much more conscientious about our health and what we eat. We're more likely to keep a lighter diet. That's part of our contemporary lifestyle.

Tim: Is this light diet something new for Italians?

Tony: No. On the contrary, it's older than the Roman Empire. The Etruscans, a very interesting people who civilized central Italy well before Rome, were thoughtful about their diet and ate mostly vegetables. The Etruscans knew about harmony in life and with nature; it was very important to them. The balance in their diet kept them healthy. You can get a feeling for their healthy lifestyle from their very beautiful art.

Tim: The addition of purslane to your zucchini salad struck me as a particularly healthy touch. I understand it has more Omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants than any other leafy vegetable.

Tony: True. Its tangy, crunchy, earthy taste is seasonal, as well as healthy. Think of it as a taste of things to come, both for the season, our lifestyle, and for Italian cuisine.

Tim: We'll do that. Thanks, Tony. ▲

Bocconcini di vitello al vino bianco e salvia (Veal stew in white wine and sage)

Serves four

INGREDIENTS

Veal shoulder, fat trimmed (30-32 oz.). Cut into 1½" cubes.

One medium carrot, diced into ½" cubes

One celery stalk, diced into ½" cubes

One medium onion, diced into ½" cubes

8 oz. vegetable oil

4 oz. extra virgin olive oil

8 oz. dry white wine

8 oz. chicken stock

6 oz. all purpose flour

6 fresh, chopped sage leaves

4 sprigs Italian parsley, leaves only, chopped

Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 475°. Over high heat on stovetop, heat vegetable oil in ovenproof skillet. Meanwhile, dredge veal in flour, and pound meat to remove extra flour. When oil is hot and a little smoky, place veal in skillet. Cook on each side until golden, about 3 to 4 minutes per side. Take meat from pan, and place in strainer to drain excess oil.

Clear vegetable oil from pan, then add extra virgin olive oil and cook on high heat. When oil gets a little smoky, add celery, carrot, and onion. Braise over high heat for 6-8 minutes. Then add chopped sage, return veal to skillet, and mix all ingredients well. Cook for a few minutes. Add wine and cook for 4-5 minutes more, until wine evaporates. Then pour in chicken broth, add parsley, salt and pepper, and mix well.

Cover skillet with aluminum foil and place in oven for 50 minutes. When dish is ready, place on stovetop and reduce sauce to your preferred consistency. Then put all ingredients on a serving dish. Garnish with potato purée or a vegetable of choice.

Insalata di zucchini (Zucchini salad)

Serves four

INGREDIENTS

4 fresh zucchini, 6"-8" long

1 lb. purslane, tender leaves only

½ red bell pepper, seeded and cut into ¼" squares

2 oz. balsamic vinegar

3 oz. extra virgin olive oil

4 fresh mint leaves, chopped

Salt and pepper to taste

½ gallon cold water

4 lbs. ice



Put water and ice in glass bowl. Cut zucchini exterior and adjacent firm area with mandoline into 1/16" strips. Discard soft interior. Add cut zucchini and place bowl in refrigerator for one hour, so that zucchini becomes crunchy and curly. Remove zucchini, water, and ice from bowl. Shake out as much water from zucchini as possible, and return them to bowl. Then add all other ingredients, mix well, and serve.