

ITALY BY INGREDIENT

ARTISANAL FOODS / MODERN RECIPES



VIOLA BUTONI

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MOLLY DECOUDREAUX

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK



I am a consistent credit giver to those who inspire my cooking, but this is one recipe for which I wish I could take all the glory. Alas, I cannot: it spun out of the fervid culinary imagination of my favorite balsamic vinegar producer and darling friend, Mariangela Montanari, whose lively home has become a mandatory stop on all my visits to Italy.

Lardo is becoming easier to source, but if you cannot find it, a paper-thin slice of pancetta is a good stand-in. While caper leaves (see page 60) might seem an extravagance, I know you will soon depend on their fleshy zing. Should you nonetheless opt to live life without them, you can finish the dish with a few salt-packed capers, well rinsed, and soaked in warm water while the pears are baking.

Pere al forno con lardo sciolto, nocciole e aceto balsamico tradizionale

Roasted pears with melted lardo, hazelnuts, and traditional balsamic vinegar

Heat the oven to 375°F / 190°C / gas mark 5.

Peel the pears and halve them lengthwise. Scoop out the core. Slice each half across from stem to base in slices $\frac{1}{8}$ inch / 3 mm thick, keeping them together—think Hasselback potato.

Arrange each pear half in an individual baking dish. Cut the lemon in half and sprinkle a few drops of juice on the pear halves. Place the dishes on a sheet pan and bake the pears for about 25 to 30 minutes, until they are tender enough to be pierced with ease but not jammy.

Remove from the oven and immediately drape a lardo slice over each pear half. Dot with the vinegar, dust with the hazelnuts, and finish with the caper leaves. Serve warm.

FOR 4 PEOPLE

2 ripe but firm pears

1 Meyer lemon

4 paper-thin slices lardo (the length of the pears)

Traditional balsamic vinegar extravacchio, for finishing

2 tablespoons chopped toasted hazelnuts

4 caper leaves