

From Puglia
to Venice,
recipes from
Italy's Adriatic
Coast

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Italians have a fear of catching cold. When I was growing up, I was frequently instructed to cover my neck or close the door for fear of getting ‘un giro d’aria’ (a hit of air) and getting sick. Every morning my mother squeezed fresh orange juice for me to protect me from such an eventuality.

And so we come to ‘peri petorai’ – warm spicy pears that are meant to ward off respiratory illnesses caused by the alpine Bora wind that blows through the Gulf of Trieste. Traditionally, this recipe would be made with small volpine pears; if you don’t have access to these, use the smallest pears you can find, or large pears cut into quarters.

SPICED PEARS POACHED IN RED WINE

PERI PETORAI

SERVES 4

750 ml (3 cups) red wine (preferably Refosco or merlot)
150 g (5½ oz) caster (superfine) sugar
1 cinnamon stick (or 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon)
3 cloves
peel of 1 orange, in strips
12 small pears (or 4 larger ones)
mascarpone or vanilla ice cream, to serve (optional)

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F) conventional.

Place the wine, sugar, cinnamon, cloves and orange peel in a saucepan and warm over medium heat until the sugar has dissolved. Remove from the heat and set aside.

Carefully peel the pears and place them upright in a deep baking dish, trimming the bases to help them balance, if needed. Ideally you want the pears to fit quite snugly. Pour the wine mixture over the pears to cover and bake for 15 minutes for small pears, or 20 minutes or more for larger pears. Check that the pears are tender by inserting a thin skewer – it should go in without any resistance. Using tongs, carefully remove the pears from the dish and set aside.

Strain the liquid, discarding the peel and spices. Pour it back into the pan and simmer over medium–high heat until reduced to a thick syrup.

Serve the warm pears and syrup just as they are, or with a spoonful of mascarpone or vanilla ice cream.