

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

Paola
Bacchia



Rice, potatoes and salty mussels are layered in this traditional one-pot dish. I have eaten it in both Lecce and Manfredonia, although it's said to be from Bari, and, according to popular opinion, the use of rice in the dish harks back to the Spanish invasion of Puglia. So it has a bit of everywhere in it! The rice needs to be cooked until it is fluffy with only a hint of bite, so make sure you add plenty of water. Everything tastes better with a bit of cheese, so topping the dish with a good sprinkling of aged pecorino gives a sharp taste as well as a golden topping.

This is particularly nice accompanied by a glass of white Fiano from the Gargano.

MUSSELS BAKED WITH POTATOES AND RICE

TIELLA COZZE,
RISO E PATATE

SERVES 6-8

1 garlic clove, finely chopped
3 tablespoons white wine
700 g (1 lb 9 oz) fresh mussels, cleaned and debearded
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
600 g (1 lb 5 oz) potatoes, peeled and cut into 5 mm (¼ in) thick slices
1 small white onion, thinly sliced
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) ripe cherry tomatoes (or other small tomatoes), quartered
3 tablespoons finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
300 g (10½ oz) short-grain rice
50 g (1¾ oz) grated aged pecorino

Preheat the oven to 200°C (400°F) conventional.

Place a large frying pan with a lid over medium-high heat. Add the garlic, wine and mussels in a single layer, then cover and cook for about 2 minutes, shaking the pan every 30 seconds or so. Remove the open shells and set aside. Replace the lid and cook the remaining mussels for another 30 seconds, then check again for open shells and remove those that have opened. Repeat a few more times, then discard any unopened shells after 5 minutes.

Strain the liquid left in the pan and reserve. Using a small sharp knife, separate the mussel meat from the open shell at the base of the stalk.

Drizzle the olive oil over the base of a 24 cm (9½ in) round baking dish (ideally terracotta) and top with one-third of the potato slices. Next add half the onion, half the tomato, 1 tablespoon of parsley, a pinch of salt and some pepper, half the rice, then half the mussels, making sure the opening of the mussel flesh is facing up. Then add half the remaining potato and repeat the layers described above, finishing with a final layer of potato. Pour the reserved mussel liquid into the dish, along with enough hot water to bring the liquid just below the top layer of potato.

Scatter on the pecorino, then cover with foil and bake for 45 minutes. Check the potato is cooked through. If it's still firm, bake for another 5-10 minutes, then check again. When the potato is ready, remove the foil and bake for 5-10 minutes, until the top is golden. Leave to rest for at least 30 minutes, then scatter with the remaining parsley and serve.



In Puglia and Abruzzo the term 'pizza' is used for both sweet and savoury pies, not what we generally think of as pizza. This recipe is based on one for a sweet ricotta Easter pie I found in the sweet section of a cookbook of dishes from the Pescara region, *Ci vo': La cucina marinara Pescara*.

If you make this crostata for Easter Sunday lunch, bake it first thing in the morning and let it cool completely. That way, you'll really be able to savour the flavours of the aniseed in the pastry, and the orange zest in the sweet ricotta filling.

RICOTTA CROSTATA

PIZZA DOLCE
DI RICOTTA

SERVES 10–12

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) fresh ricotta, drained
2 eggs
125 g (4½ oz) granulated sugar
75 g (2½ oz) dark chocolate (45% cocoa solids), grated or finely chopped
100 g (3½ oz) natural almonds, finely chopped (not ground)
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
finely grated zest of 1 small orange
3 tablespoons white rum
icing (confectioners') sugar, for dusting

Pastry

250 g (1½ cups) plain (all-purpose) flour, plus extra for dusting
1 scant teaspoon baking powder
pinch of salt
125 g (4½ oz) granulated sugar
1 egg
3 tablespoons milk
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1½ tablespoons aniseed liqueur, such as sambuca

To make the pastry, place the flour, baking powder, salt and sugar in a large bowl and whisk to incorporate. Add the egg, milk, olive oil and liqueur and stir with a wooden spoon until the dough comes together. You could also use a food processor.

Preheat the oven to 170°C (340°F) conventional and line a 21 cm (8¼ in) tart tin with a removable base.

Dust your work surface with flour and knead the dough for a minute or two until smooth. Cut the dough into two portions – you need two-thirds of the dough for the base and side, and one-third for the lattice top. Roll out the larger portion of dough between two sheets of plastic wrap to a large circle that is 3–4 mm (⅛ in) thick. Carefully lift the pastry into the prepared tin, using your fingers to gently flatten it onto the base and side, cutting off the excess with a sharp knife. Wrap the remaining portion of dough in plastic wrap and rest in the fridge while you make the filling.

Using a wooden spoon, combine the ricotta, eggs and sugar in a large bowl until smooth. Add the chocolate, almonds, cinnamon, orange zest and rum. Stir until well combined, then spoon the filling into the pastry case.

Roll out the remaining dough to a thickness of 3–4 mm (⅛ in). Cut the dough into strips (mine were just under 1 cm/½ in wide), then arrange the strips in a lattice pattern over the filling, gently pinching the ends to attach them to the pastry rim.

Bake for 50–60 minutes, until the lattice is cooked through and golden. Set aside to cool completely.

Dust with icing sugar and serve cold. The 'pizza' will keep in an airtight container in a cool spot for 1–2 days, although the pastry will soften slightly.

