

Sicilian Pasta with Sardines

Pasta con le Sarde - a classic Sicilian marriage of land and sea

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Prep Time	Cook Time	Total Time	Servings
20 minutes	40 minutes	1 hour	4-6

A Sicilian dish par excellence, Pasta con le Sarde combines fresh sardines, fennel, raisins, pine nuts, saffron, anchovies, and toasted breadcrumbs. The result is savory, aromatic, lightly sweet, and deeply Mediterranean.

Why Nonna Suggests This Recipe

Authenticity: A timeless dish passed down through generations and steeped in Sicilian tradition.

Seasonal Freshness: It highlights the best seasonal ingredients, especially fresh sardines and fennel.

Balanced Flavors: Raisins, pine nuts, saffron, anchovies, and breadcrumbs create a beautiful sweet-savory balance.

Perfect for Special Occasions: A wonderful recipe for St. Joseph's Day, Sunday lunch, or any gathering that celebrates heritage.

Ingredients

For the Pasta

- 400 g / 14 oz bucatini, thick spaghetti, or linguine
- 400 g / 14 oz fennel, wild if available
- 400 g / 14 oz fresh sardines, cleaned and deboned
- 2 tbsp raisins, soaked and drained
- 2 tbsp pine nuts
- 1 glass of water
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 4 anchovy fillets
- 1/4 tsp saffron powder
- Extra virgin olive oil, to taste
- Salt and pepper, to taste

For the Toasted Breadcrumbs

- 100 g / 1 cup breadcrumbs
- 1 clove garlic
- Extra virgin olive oil, to taste

Instructions

1. Prepare the Fennel

Wash the fennel thoroughly and remove any tough stems. Boil it in salted water for about 10 minutes. Remove with a skimmer and set aside. Reserve the cooking water for the pasta.

2. Clean the Sardines

Remove the head, tail, and central bone from the sardines. Open them flat and set aside.

3. Make the Sauce

In a large frying pan, saute the onion and anchovy fillets in 2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil over medium heat until softened. Add 1 glass of water and the saffron, stirring to combine. Add the raisins, pine nuts, sardines, and fennel. Season with pepper, cover, and cook gently for about 3 minutes over low heat.

4. Toast the Breadcrumbs

In a separate pan, toast the breadcrumbs with a drizzle of olive oil and 1 clove of garlic until golden and fragrant. Remove the garlic and set the breadcrumbs aside.

5. Cook the Pasta

Bring the reserved fennel cooking water back to a boil. Cook the pasta until al dente, then drain and immediately add it to the pan with the sauce. Toss well to coat evenly.

6. Assemble and Serve

Plate the pasta and sprinkle generously with toasted breadcrumbs. Finish with a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil and serve warm.

Nonna's Tip

Use wild fennel if you can find it, because it gives the dish its most authentic Sicilian aroma. Do not skip the toasted breadcrumbs: they add the signature crunch that makes this pasta unforgettable.

Storage & Serving Notes

This pasta is best served warm right after tossing. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 2 days. Reheat gently in a pan with a small drizzle of olive oil.