



Herbed Ricotta Gnocchi with Dungeness Crab

Serves 4

Every now and then I break free of the culinary taboo against mixing cheese and fish. The combination of ricotta, crab, and lemon may seem a bit unorthodox, but they have a wonderful affinity for one another.

Making ricotta gnocchi is less involved than preparing their potato counterpart. This is essentially a filling for ravioli without the pasta, using our own house-made ricotta cheese. Be sure the cheese is well drained. Too much whey will make the batter too loose to hold its shape during cooking.

Kosher salt

9 ounces Fresh Ricotta Cheese (recipe follows), well drained

1/4 cup plus 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour, sifted

1 large egg

6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese

1 tablespoon chopped fresh Italian parsley

1 tablespoon chopped fresh savory

1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon

1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 cup Dungeness crabmeat, drained and picked clean

Juice of 1/2 lemon

2 tablespoons Persillade (recipe follows), for garnish

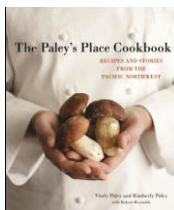
Preserved Lemon Peel (recipe follows), for garnish

Fill a 3-quart pot three-fourths full with water, bring to a boil over high heat, and salt well. Decrease the heat to medium.

To make the batter, in the work bowl of a food processor fitted with the metal blade, add the ricotta, flour, egg, 2 tablespoons of the olive oil, 1/2 teaspoon salt, half the Parmesan, parsley, savory, tarragon, and chives, and process until smooth.

Have a large platter ready. To make the gnocchi, transfer one third of the batter to a pastry bag fitted with a large straight tip, or a self-sealing plastic bag with one corner snipped 1/2 inch wide. Working over the simmering water, squeeze out the batter, cutting it into 1-inch lengths with a small knife to form the gnocchi, working in batches so as not to crowd the gnocchi. Poach the pieces until firm, about 3 minutes.

With a slotted spoon, gently transfer the cooked gnocchi to the platter. Drizzle with olive oil. Repeat with the remaining batter. Reserve 1/4 cup of gnocchi cooking water.



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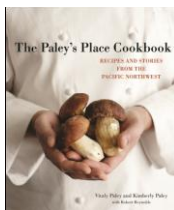
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To make the sauce, in a large skillet, melt the butter over medium heat; add 1/4 cup of gnocchi cooking water. Gently transfer the poached gnocchi to the pan. Stir in the crab and lemon juice and cook, stirring carefully, until the mixture is warm through, about 3 minutes.

To serve, spoon the gnocchi into individual pasta bowls, and garnish with the remaining Parmesan cheese, persillade, and lemon peel.



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Fresh Ricotta Cheese

Makes 1 1/4 cups (about 10 ounces)

If the restaurant had a motto, it might be: "If we can make it better, we will." After trying several commercial brands of ricotta without ever really being satisfied with their flavor and texture, we made it ourselves. It proved a worthy experiment. It had the creamiest of textures with just the right balance of flavors.

If you ever thought about making your own cheese, this is the easiest one to start with. A watchful eye and a well-calibrated instant-read thermometer are the only tools you'll need.

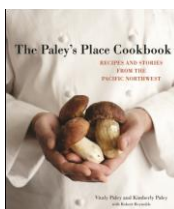
1/2 cup heavy cream
4 cups whole milk
2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
Pinch of kosher salt

In a nonreactive saucepan, combine the cream, milk, and lemon juice and cook over medium-low heat until the mixture reaches 205°F. (Remember, cheese making is a science and temperature is crucial.)

Remove from the heat and let rest for about 15 minutes, during which time the curds and whey separate.

Line a strainer with cheesecloth and set over a bowl. Ladle the curds (the ricotta cheese) into the strainer to drain the whey. Cover tightly with plastic wrap, refrigerate, and let drain overnight.

Discard the whey and wipe the bowl dry. Transfer the ricotta to the bowl. Stir in the salt, cover tightly, and refrigerate until needed. Ricotta will keep well refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 3 days.



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Persillade

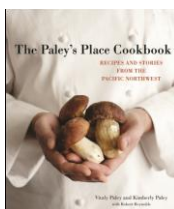
Makes about 1/3 cup

If there is one thing I cannot do without in my kitchen, it's this simple mixture of garlic and parsley chopped together. Used sparingly, persillade has an extraordinary ability to transform the flavor of any savory dish. It is easy to make and holds well, covered, in the refrigerator for a day or so, although it is best when freshly made.

I developed a taste for it when Kimberly and I spent a year at a small restaurant in the center of France, near Limoges. France has a gastronomic Mason-Dixon Line: in the north, the food rests on butter and shallots; in the south, it is olive oil and garlic. In Alsace (in the north), if you put garlic in the food, people act like you set their mouth on fire. The further south you go, the more garlic you find, with its most assertive use near Nice, close to Italy. It is important to note that garlic is a powerful tool and its use needs to be modulated to suit various preparations.

1 bunch Italian parsley, leaves only
3 large cloves garlic

Finely chop the parsley on a cutting board, then gather it to one side of the board. Finely chop the garlic. Mix them together and chop some more until well incorporated. Transfer the mixture to a small container, cover tightly, and refrigerate until ready to use.



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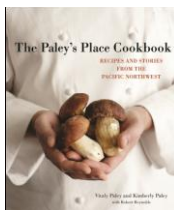
Preserved Lemon Peel
Makes 2 tablespoons

The conventional way of preserving lemons can be time consuming. I devised this quick and easy alternative.

1 lemon, washed and dried
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon sugar

With a paring knife, remove the peel from the lemon in large pieces, then cut it into julienne strips. In a small saucepan, place the peel and enough cold water to cover and cook over high heat until the water boils. Drain and repeat the process twice more.

Juice the peeled lemon and strain into a small bowl; add salt and sugar, then the blanched peel. Let the peel macerate at room temperature for 1 hour so the flavors marry. Store, refrigerated, in a tightly sealed plastic container. It will keep for about a week.



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