

Potato Gnocchi with Pomodoro Sauce

It takes two ... there are some tasks in life that are much more enjoyable when shared with someone else, preferably someone you like, even better if the prospect of romance is on the horizon. Cooking is one of them, and cooking Italian food? There's really nothing better. (Watch even a little 1960's Italian cinema and you'll understand the magic of the cuisine.) Making gnocchi from scratch can be daunting, but the rewards outweigh all the work. And it can seem effortless -- even delightful -- if you share the task of making it. If you don't get carried away by the romance of it all, check your pulse.

This recipe serves more than 2 people (6 to 8), so save the leftovers to reheat later in the week.

Ingredients

the gnocchi

2½ pounds russet potatoes (about 5 medium or 4 large), washed
2¾ cup all purpose flour, plus more for rolling
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
scant 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground white pepper (black pepper will work too)
2 large egg yolks

the pomodoro sauce

1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
pinch crushed red pepper flakes
1 (28-ounce) can peeled San Marzano tomatoes, crushed by hand
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
5 basil leaves, torn

for serving

Freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano

special equipment

Potato ricer
Bench scraper

Directions

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Pierce each potato all over with a knife and wrap individually in aluminum foil. Place on a baking sheet and bake until tender when pierced with a knife (about 1 hour, but could be a bit longer depending on the size of your potatoes). Remove from the oven and let cool.

for the sauce

Heat the oil in a medium, heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat. Add the garlic and red pepper flakes. Cook for 30 seconds until fragrant. Stir in the tomatoes and simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Keep warm while you make gnocchi. Stir in the basil just before serving with gnocchi.

for the gnocchi

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and sprinkle with a dusting of flour. When potatoes are cool enough to handle, peel and press the potatoes through the ricer into a mound on a large, clean board or counter. Whisk together the flour with the salt, nutmeg and pepper. Sprinkle the flour over the mound of potatoes and make a well in the center. Add the yolks to the well and, using a fork, slowly incorporate the flour and potato into the eggs. When the dough is a shaggy mass, bring it to together with your hands and gently knead until the dough is uniform, slightly wet, but not sticking to board. (This should take about 2 minutes. For tender gnocchi, avoid over-kneading.) Bring dough together in a rectangular mound. Using a bench scraper, divide the dough into 8 equal pieces. Lightly flour your work surface and, using a light touch, roll one piece into a long rope about a half-inch in diameter. Cut the rope into 1-inch-long pieces with the bench scraper. You can leave your gnocchi as is, or roll it off a fork to form ridges (See Cook's Note). Keep them in a single layer on the prepared baking sheet while you repeat with the rest of the dough, sprinkling more flour as needed to keep gnocchi from sticking together (See Cook's Note).

Bring a large pot of water to a boil and salt the water generously. Working in batches if necessary, add the gnocchi carefully to the boiling water, stirring once. When the gnocchi bob to the surface, cook for an additional 2 minutes. Strain and serve hot, topped with pomodoro sauce and grated Parmigiano cheese.

Refrigerate any leftovers. They can be reheated easily in a saute pan the next day.

Cook's Notes

-- The formed, uncooked gnocchi can be frozen in a single layer on the sheet tray. Once frozen, they can be moved to a freezer-safe bag and stored for up to 3 weeks, until ready to use. Cook the frozen gnocchi directly to the boiling water. They will take about a minute longer to float to the surface.

-- Rolling the dough along a fork or a gnocchi roller (available at Italian cooking supply stores) adds more than a decorative touch. As you roll, you thin out the center of the gnocchi so it fully cooks through, and the ridges collect sauce.

total time: 2½ hours

active prep: 1 hour

serves: 6 to 8

difficulty: moderate