Celebrity Chefs' Summer Eats: Lidia Bastianich's Pomodori Ghiotti (a.k.a. Gluttonous Tomatoes)

Chef Lidia Bastianich celebrates summer with a farm fresh taste of home.

LAURIE US STER · JUL 8, 2014

A traditional Italian stuffed tomato becomes a centerpiece for friends and family once Lidia Bastianich gets involved. With familiar ingredients reminiscent of her childhood in her grandparents' home – eggs from the chicken coop, tomatoes from the garden – she has reinvented a simple dish and created a brunch that brings everyone to the table.

Chef Lidia Bastianich and her family at their Mother's Day celebration this year

Bastianich is a world-renowned chef, restaurant owner, author, and Emmy-winning TV host, but she's also a woman who relishes the simplicity of foraging for wild mushrooms in the woods, spending time with her grandchildren, and sitting down to a good, simple meal with a glass of wine. Despite her hectic schedule of book signings, TV appearances, cooking, and writing – both cookbooks and children's books – she always makes time for family. When her grandchildren have birthdays, their gift is a trip with her to somewhere special, where new memories are created together.

Bastianich's quality time with her own grandmother was spent in her garden, where young Lidia learned the magic of growing half a dozen potatoes from the sprout of just one, and the true meaning of "farm to table" before it was chic. In Italy, the focus is on "primizia," the first or early seasonal produce, and it is this that Bastianich looks forward to each season. It makes her feel connected to the earth, whether she's in Istria where she spent her early childhood, or at home in Queens with her mother, picking vegetables in their lush garden.

She loves fresh tomatoes, and says baking them in her recipe for Pomodori Ghiotti brings out their beauty, concentrating their sweetness and flavor. The perfect drink to match? A glass of Prosecco.

"This is a perfect appetizer or lunch dish, but I love making it for breakfast, especially when you have a house full of people. Set the filled tomatoes in the oven and, when done, bring the roasting pan full of burning tomatoes to the table. There will be a run on these tomatoes!" – Lidia Bastianich

Serves: 8

Ingredients:

4 large firm tomatoes, halved at the belly

2 cups stale 1/2-inch country bread cubes, crusts removed

2/3 cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano

2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

2 teaspoons dried oregano

1 teaspoon kosher salt

4 large eggs

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Scoop out the seeds and pulp of the tomatoes over a fine strainer making tomato shells. Press the collected seeds and pulp through the strainer and collect the juice. You should have about 3/4 cup tomato juice.

In a large bowl, combine the bread cubes, 1/3 cup grated cheese, parsley, 2 tablespoons of olive oil, 1 teaspoon dried oregano and 1/2 teaspoon salt and toss well.

Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with the remaining tablespoon of olive oil and set the tomato shells inside. Season the inside of the tomatoes with the remaining ½ teaspoon salt. Pack the tomatoes with the stuffing, making an indentation in each mound of stuffing large enough to break an egg into. Pour tomato juice in the bottom of the pan (but not on the tomatoes).

Bake for about 10 minutes to heat the filling and get the tomato juices bubbling. Uncover and carefully break an egg into each indentation. Sprinkle the eggs with the remaining 1/3 cup of grated cheese and 1 teaspoon dried oregano. Bake for about 15 minutes until the egg whites are set, but yolks are still a little runny.

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