

MARE E TERRA

# The Spring Table

*Five Mediterranean Recipes for the Season of Renewal*

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Stories & recipes from the Adriatic to the Aegean

YOUR FREE GUIDE FROM MARE E TERRA

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*"The table is where seasons tell their story."*

# Asparagus & Pea Risotto

*Spring's First Green — Risotto agli Asparagi e Piselli*

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## The Story

In the Veneto region, risotto isn't just a dish — it's a ritual. The first asparagus of spring (asparago di Bassano) is celebrated with festivals in April and May. Venetian farmers believe the best asparagus grows in sandy soil near the Brenta River, where the water table keeps the roots cool and the spears tender. This recipe pairs them with the sweetest early peas, another spring arrival that signals the end of winter's root vegetables.

**Prep:** 10 min **Cook:** 25 min **Serves:** 4

## Ingredients

300 g (2 cups) Carnaroli or Arborio rice

200 g fresh asparagus, woody ends removed, cut into 3 cm pieces

150 g fresh or frozen peas

1 small onion, finely diced

750 ml vegetable or chicken broth, warm

75 ml dry white wine

30 g butter

40 g Parmesan or Grana Padano, grated

2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

Salt and white pepper to taste

A handful of fresh mint, torn (for garnish)

## Method

1. Blanch the asparagus tips in boiling salted water for 2 minutes. Remove and set aside. Add the stalks and peas to the same water and cook for 3 minutes. Drain, reserving the cooking water to top up your broth if needed.
2. In a wide pan, warm the olive oil over medium heat. Sauté the onion until translucent — about 4 minutes — without browning.

3. Add the rice and stir for 1 minute until the grains are glossy and the edges turn translucent. This is the *tostatura* and it's non-negotiable.
4. Pour in the wine and stir until it's fully absorbed by the rice.
5. Add the warm broth one ladle at a time, stirring frequently. Wait until each addition is mostly absorbed before adding the next. This should take 16-18 minutes.
6. Halfway through, stir in the blanched pea and asparagus stalk mixture (reserving the tips).
7. When the rice is al dente (tender but with a slight bite), remove from heat. Stir in the butter and Parmesan. Cover and rest for 2 minutes — this is the *mantecatura*.
8. Plate and top with the reserved asparagus tips and torn mint. Serve immediately, with extra Parmesan on the side.

# Grilled Sardines with Oregano & Olive Oil

*The Coast's Bounty — Sgombro alla Griglia (or simply: Sardine sulla Brace)*

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## The Story

Sardines are the backbone of the Adriatic fishing tradition. In Dalmatian coastal towns, May marks the start of *srdela* season — small, silver-blue fish so abundant they've fed coastal communities for millennia. The ancient Greeks salted them; the Venetians traded them. But the simplest preparation — fresh sardines, just hours from the sea, grilled over an open fire with wild oregano and a drizzle of fruity olive oil — is the one that has survived unchanged. It's a dish that requires nothing more than good ingredients and patience at the fire.

**Prep:** 15 min (+ 30 min marinating) **Cook:** 6 min **Serves:** 2 as main / 4 as starter

## Ingredients

8-12 fresh sardines, gutted and scaled (ask your fishmonger)

4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling

2 tbsp dried wild oregano (rigano — the best from Crete or Sicily)

2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced

Juice of 1 lemon

Coarse sea salt and cracked black pepper

Lemon wedges, for serving

A handful of flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped

## Method

1. Rinse the sardines and pat them very dry with paper towels. Make 3 shallow diagonal cuts on each side (this helps the marinade penetrate and ensures even cooking).
2. Mix the olive oil, oregano, garlic, lemon juice, salt, and pepper in a shallow dish. Add the sardines and turn to coat. Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes — no longer, or the acid will start to "cook" the fish.
3. Prepare a hot grill (charcoal is ideal, but a cast-iron griddle works beautifully indoors). The grate should be very clean and well-oiled to prevent sticking.

4. Grill the sardines for 2-3 minutes per side. They're ready when the skin is blistered and crisp, and the flesh flakes easily. Don't overcook — sardines go from perfect to dry in seconds.
5. Transfer to a serving plate. Drizzle with a generous swirl of raw olive oil, a squeeze of fresh lemon, and a scattering of parsley.
6. Serve with crusty bread and a simple green salad. Eat with your hands. It's the only way.

# Wild Garlic & Potato Frittata

*Forager's Delight — Frittata con Aglio Orsino e Patate*

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## The Story

Wild garlic (or *aglio orsino* — "bear's garlic") carpets the forest floors of the Apennines and the Dinaric Alps for a few short weeks in April and May. Its season is brief and unpredictable — three weeks, maybe four. Foragers track it by following the scent: a sweet, pungent garlic aroma that precedes the broad green leaves by several metres. The leaves are milder than cultivated garlic, with a grassy, almost peppery finish. This frittata is the quintessential forager's breakfast — made in the field, in a cast-iron pan over a campfire, with eggs from a nearby farm and potatoes dug that morning.

**Prep:** 10 min **Cook:** 20 min **Serves:** 2 as main / 6 as slice

## Ingredients

6 large free-range eggs

2 medium waxy potatoes (such as Yukon Gold or Charlotte), thinly sliced (2-3 mm)

2 large handfuls of wild garlic leaves (about 40 g), roughly chopped

1 small onion, thinly sliced

3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

30 g Parmesan, finely grated

Salt and black pepper

A pinch of red pepper flakes (optional)

## Method

1. If you're foraging your own wild garlic, pick only the leaves — never the bulbs. Rinse thoroughly and pat dry. Wild garlic grows in damp areas, so a good wash is essential.
2. Heat the olive oil in a 20-22 cm non-stick or well-seasoned cast-iron pan over medium heat. Add the potato slices in a single, slightly overlapping layer.

Season with salt and cook for 5-6 minutes, turning once, until golden and tender.

3. Add the sliced onion and cook for another 3 minutes until softened. Add the wild garlic leaves and stir until they just wilt — about 30 seconds.
4. Whisk the eggs with the Parmesan, salt, pepper, and optional red pepper flakes. Pour over the potato mixture. Reduce the heat to medium-low.
5. Cook without stirring for 8-10 minutes, until the edges are set and the centre is just slightly jiggly. Finish under a hot grill (broiler) for 2 minutes until the top is puffed and golden.
6. Let rest for 2 minutes before sliding onto a plate. Serve warm or at room temperature — it's equally good both ways.

## Roman Artichoke & Mint Salad

*Carciofi alla Romana — The Eternal City's Spring Bite*

### The Story

The Roman artichoke — *carciofo romanesco*, sometimes called the "globe artichoke" — has been cultivated in the Lazio region since at least the 15th century. Unlike the spiny purple varieties of the south, the Romanesco is round, meaty, and almost entirely without thorns. Late April through early June is the peak season, when the artichokes are young enough to eat raw in a *pinzimonio* (dip into olive oil and salt) — a true test of an artichoke's quality. This salad, inspired by Roman Jewish cuisine, pairs the artichokes with fresh mint, another spring arrival that grows wild along the Tiber's banks.

**Prep:** 20 min **Cook:** 15 min **Serves:** 4 as starter

### Ingredients

4 large globe artichokes

1 lemon, halved

3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

2 tbsp fresh mint, finely chopped

1 tbsp fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped

1 clove garlic, minced

Coarse sea salt and black pepper

Optional: shaved Pecorino Romano (for finishing)

### Method

1. Fill a large bowl with cold water and squeeze the lemon halves into it. Reserve the squeezed halves.
2. Prepare the artichokes one at a time: peel away the tough outer leaves until you reach the pale, tender inner leaves. Cut off the top third of the artichoke and trim the stem to 2 cm. Peel the outer dark-green layer from the stem. Cut each artichoke in half lengthwise and scoop out the fuzzy choke with a

teaspoon. Rub all cut surfaces with the reserved lemon halves and drop into the acidulated water.

3. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Add the artichokes and cook for 10-12 minutes until a knife slides easily into the stem. Drain and let cool until just warm.
4. Slice each artichoke half into 4-5 wedges and place in a serving bowl.
5. Whisk together the olive oil, mint, parsley, garlic, salt, and pepper. Pour over the artichokes and toss gently.
6. Let rest for 10 minutes before serving (this allows the flavours to meld). Top with shaved Pecorino if using, and serve with crusty bread to soak up the juices.

# Strawberry & Rosewater Granita

*A Sweet Farewell to Spring — Granita di Fragole e Acqua di Rose*

## The Story

Sicily's granita culture is a story of Arab influence meeting Italian ingenuity. When the Moors ruled Sicily (9th-11th centuries), they brought sugarcane, citrus, and roses — three ingredients that would transform the island's cuisine. The granita, a semi-frozen dessert coarser than sorbet, was born in the Iblei Mountains near Ragusa, where snow was harvested from Mount Etna and stored in underground pits (*neviere*). By May, the first Sicilian strawberries arrive — smaller and more intensely flavoured than their northern cousins, with a perfume that pairs perfectly with the rosewater that was a gift from the Arab world. This granita is a bridge between spring and summer, between two worlds that met in Sicily and never parted.

**Prep:** 15 min **Freeze:** 4+ hours (overnight is best) **Serves:** 4

## Ingredients

500 g ripe strawberries, hulled

100 g caster sugar (adjust to the sweetness of your strawberries)

200 ml water

2 tbsp rosewater (food-grade, from a Mediterranean grocer or Middle Eastern store)

Juice of ½ a lemon

A pinch of sea salt

Optional: whole rose petals (dried or fresh, pesticide-free) for garnish

## Method

1. In a small saucepan, combine the sugar and water. Warm over medium heat, stirring, until the sugar dissolves completely. Remove from heat and let cool to room temperature.
2. Blend the strawberries until completely smooth. Pass through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl, pressing with the back of a spoon to extract all the juice. Discard the seeds (or save for another use — they're lovely in vinaigrettes).

3. Stir the cooled sugar syrup, rosewater, and lemon juice into the strawberry purée. Add the pinch of salt — this intensifies the fruit flavour without making it salty.
4. Pour the mixture into a shallow metal or glass dish (a 20×30 cm baking dish works perfectly). The shallower the dish, the faster the granita freezes and the better the texture.
5. Place in the freezer. After 30 minutes, rake the mixture with a fork, breaking up the ice crystals that have formed at the edges. Repeat this raking every 30 minutes for the next 3 hours. The goal is a fluffy, crystalline texture — not a solid block of ice.
6. Once fully frozen and fluffy (after about 4 hours), the granita is ready. If frozen overnight, let it sit at room temperature for 10 minutes and re-rake before serving.
7. Scoop into chilled glasses. Garnish with a few rose petals and serve immediately. In Sicily, this is eaten for breakfast with a warm brioche — but it works just as well as an after-dinner palate cleanser.

## Hungry for more?

This is just the beginning. Every other week, the Mare e Terra newsletter brings you seasonal recipes, ingredient stories, and a deeper look at the Mediterranean table — from the Adriatic to the Aegean.

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