



GNOCCHI

Cuisine Magazine

The origins of gnocchi's name should be left in the closet. The fact is, "gnocco" means "stupid person" or "blockhead," referring to the people who made uninspired dishes of dumplings without any flavor or sauce.



In the Italian food arena, gnocchi [NYOH-kee] has come to mean dumpling. Dumplings are pieces of dough usually made from flour (a starch) and water and then poached, baked, or fried. Good dumplings are made by adding flavorful ingredients or by being served in a soup or sauce. Are you familiar with Jewish matzo balls or spätzle from Germany? These are well-known dumplings. Well, gnocchi is from Italy and there's different kinds from different regions. But the very basic recipe refers to gnocchi di patate--potato gnocchi.

Light Gnocchi: I don't know about you, but I've eaten some gnocchi that have made me feel like I've swallowed whole baked potatoes. Just like any dumpling, gnocchi has to be light. The perfect gnocchi has just enough flour to hold it together without breaking apart when poached. The more flour that's added, the heavier they'll be. Think about it. The more liquid in the dough, the more flour you have to add to make the gnocchi hold together. That's why I don't add eggs. Is this hard? Not really.

Potatoes: Use a floury potato (russet, also called Idaho). Russets have a low- water, high-starch content.

Baking: The only way to cook russets for gnocchi is to bake them. Boiling causes the potatoes to retain too much water. Remember, the more liquid, the more flour needed to make the gnocchi hold together. And don't wrap the potatoes with aluminum foil. This traps moisture.

Shaping: You're going to shape the gnocchi into little pillows. Besides being light, good potato gnocchi has the ability to hold sauces. A dimple is made on one side. This provides a spot for sauce to gather, as well as making the gnocchi a uniform thickness for even cooking. The other side has ribs formed with a fork for sauce to cling to. Give this a shot. Many Italian cooks are judged by their gnocchi prowess. Just don't be a "gnocco."

POTATO GNOCCHI (100 pieces)

Work Time: 1 hour 20 minutes Cook Time: 2 minutes

Bake, Peel, and Rice:

2 lbs. russet potatoes

Combine with:

1-1/2 cups all-purpose flour

1/2 t. kosher salt

Knead in:

1/4 cup all-purpose flour

Garnish with:

Parmesan cheese, shredded

MAKING POTATO GNOCCHI

ONE: Bake potatoes at 400 degrees for 50 minutes, or until fork-tender. Peel potatoes, then press them through a ricer.



TWO: Combine hot potatoes, 1-1/2 cups flour, and salt in a mixing bowl. Stir with wooden spoon until ingredients are well mixed.



THREE: Turn mixture onto lightly floured surface. Knead in just enough remaining 1/4 cup flour to make a smooth dough that isn't very sticky.

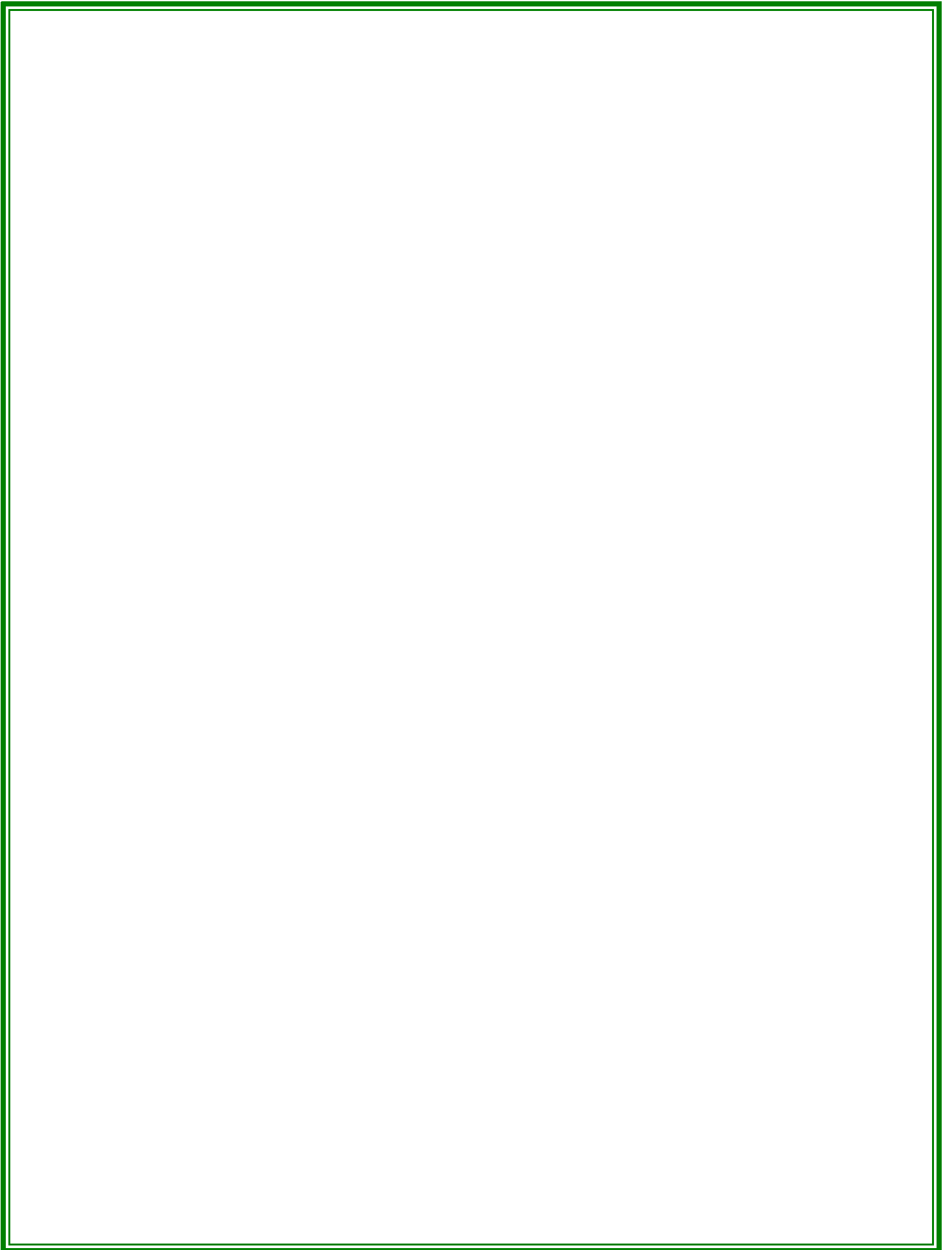


FOUR: Test dough to make sure it has enough flour. Roll pieces of dough into 3/4"-thick ropes. Cut ropes into 3/4" pieces.



FIVE: Place piece of cut dough on fork. Press with thumb to indent one side and create ridges on other. Roll ends up until they almost touch.
Before shaping, pinch a bit of gnocchi dough and flatten it slightly. Drop it in water that's just under a boil. If it starts to feather, it needs more flour. If it doesn't float after 2 minutes, it has too much flour.





SIX: Cook gnocchi in batches--don't overcrowd. Use a large pot with salted water just under a boil. Cook until they float--about 2 minutes.



GNOCCHI FLOAT TEST

To see if gnocchi has just the right amount of flour, try this float test.



FRESH TOMATO SAUCE

(Makes 5 cups) Work Time: 30 minutes Cook Time: 25 minutes

Sauté:

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
1 cup chopped yellow onion

Add and Cook over Medium Heat:

6 cups Roma tomatoes, roughly chopped
1/4 cup fresh basil chiffonade
1 t. salt

Add and Sauté:

1 T. minced garlic

MAKING FRESH TOMATO SAUCE

ONE: Sauté onions in olive oil for 5 minutes. Add garlic and tomatoes.



TWO: Simmer 30 minutes. Run through food mill. Add basil and salt. Serve over gnocchi and top with cheese.



Nutritional Information per 10 pieces with 1/4 cup Sauce: Calories 192; Total fat 4(g); Calories from fat 17%; Sodium 280(mg)