



Bucatini con le Sarde - Bucatini with Sardines

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Offering fresh, briny flavors of southern Italy, pasta with sardines is a traditional dish in Sicilia. Bucatini, a long and hollow pasta, perfectly picks up the simple sauce, which is perfectly balanced with sardines, wild fennel, and other herbs. Make this sunny recipe to transport your kitchen to the Sicilian islands!

COURSE: Primo piatto

DIFFICULTY: Medium

PREPARATION TIME: 1 hour

Yield: 4 servings

1 pound bucatini



2 pounds fennel bulbs, greens removed & reserved, bulb cut into sticks
3 pounds whole fresh sardines
Semolina flour, for coating
1 cup extra virgin olive oil
2 medium onions, minced
1 (28-ounce) can whole tomatoes, drained & chopped
3 tablespoons pine nuts, lightly toasted
3 tablespoons dried currants or raisins, soaked & drained
7 saffron strands or ½ teaspoon powdered saffron
Salt & freshly ground black pepper, to taste

In a hot skillet, add the extra virgin olive oil and sauté the fennel until it is caramelized.

Remove the heads of the sardines, and pull out the backbones and entrails. Select a few sardines for garnish, chop the rest of the sardines for the sauce and set them aside. Season the sardines for garnish to taste with salt and pepper and coat them with the semolina flour.

In a small saucepan, heat ½ cup of extra virgin olive oil over medium heat. When the oil begins to smoke, cook each flour-coated sardine until they turn a light golden brown, about 1 minute on each side. Using a slotted spoon, remove the sardines from the pan and set them aside to drain on a paper towel.

In the skillet with the caramelized fennel, add the onions, currants, tomatoes, pine nuts and saffron and season everything to taste with salt and pepper. Bring the sauce briefly to a boil and then lower it to a simmer. Add the reserved sardines and cook, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon, until the sardines have broken into pieces and are thoroughly mixed into the sauce, about 10-15 minutes. If the sauce appears too thick at this point, add a bit of pasta cooking water.

Bring 6 quarts of water and 2 tablespoons of salt to a rolling boil. Add the bucatini and cook until it is tender but still al dente. Drain the cooked pasta into a large serving bowl, add ¾ of the sauce and stir to coat the pasta thoroughly. Top the pasta with the remaining sauce and the fried sardines. This pasta tastes best if it is allowed to sit for several minutes, soaking up the flavors of the sauce, before it is served.

Keep the pasta covered during this waiting period, then garnish with the reserved fennel fronds. Serve, and enjoy!

Buon appetito!

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