

## For the Love of Garlic

Natasha Lardera (September 01, 2019)



The summer months in Italy welcome many food festivals. Among them, two celebrate Italy's two DOP garlicks: Aglio di Voghiera DOP, hailing from the province of Ferrara, in Emilia-Romagna, and Aglio Bianco Polesano DOP, from Polesine, in Veneto. Garlic is an important ingredient in Italian cuisine but it is not used in everything, many still believe it is, as its distinctive taste can sometimes detract from that of other more shy ingredients.

The experts tell us that what makes it unique is the combination of large, compact, white cloves, a distinct, pungent flavor, and a long life span: Voghiera's garlic isn't only Italy's most beloved garlic, but the true elixir for a long life - the health benefits of garlic in the treatment of colds, cancer, heart disease, hypertension, infection and even impotence are more than often praised - that is about to

be celebrated for three days in a special festival in the Castle of Belriguardo, in the province of Ferrara. In August, this special bulb that earned, back in 2007, DOP recognition, returns to flavor every type of dish, so that garlic-laced foods will be available for sampling.

At the festival, in addition to sampling, people can participate in culinary competitions, one called La Treccia Perfetta (the perfect braid, as in garlic braid), seminars, a special dance show, called Bagliamo, and a preview of a special program that will be featured at Milan's EXPO on August 21st. This is the opportunity for the Grande Mercato dei Sapori, a large local produce market, to introduce the public not only to this special garlic but to other products found in the area.

The garlic produced in Voghiera counts for less than 1% of the national production, but quality counts more than quantity; its unique characteristics derive from the terrain and environment where it is produced, with its silty-clay soils, near the Po's Delta. This garlic is cultivated in Voghiera, Masi Torello, Portomaggiore, Argenta and Ferrara according to specific rules and then it is certified by an external inspection entity, which is recognized as qualified by the Emilia Romagna region.

Aglione di Voghiera DOP is available on the market in different ways: fresh or green, meaning it has just been picked and its stems are still green; semi-dry, meaning its stems are white but not completely dry; dry, meaning that the outer skin and the stems are totally dry. The garlic is dried in a completely natural way and then braided.

During the summer months, another DOP garlic is celebrated, Aglio Bianco Polesano DOP hailing from Polesine, in Veneto. The "Festa dell'Aglio Polesano" was held in July in the Arquà Polesine Castle.

Polesine's Gold, this is how the garlic has been nicknamed, is loved for its health qualities: it is a natural antibacterial, antiseptic, mucolytic and hypotensive that cures about everything! Aglio Bianco Polesano DOP has a characteristic aroma: it is delicate and more persistent with scents of freshly cut grass or sweet fruit. Its uses are endless, it all depends on personal tastes – it can be enjoyed raw, whole or crushed, dried or in dust. Aglio Bianco Polesano DOP gives dishes a unique taste.

Garlic is an important ingredient in Italian cuisine but it is not used in everything, many still believe it is, as its distinctive taste can sometimes detract from that of other more shy ingredients. It is used in some sauces, stews, soups, salad dressings, pasta sauces, casseroles, breads and grains. An important rule: when sautéing, avoid overcooking because as the garlic browns it begins to exude a bitter aroma that will be a portent of its contribution to the final flavor of the dish.

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