

Recipe

When they started making buffalo mozzarella in Australia I nearly wet my knickers. This is so much better than any other type by a massive mile. We are now getting in Italian buffalo mozzarella just as good, but there's nothing quite like it being super fresh — you can tear it apart in big chunks and sink your teeth into it with a little salt and pepper and a dash of olive oil — I am in heaven! It's soft and yielding and the most perfect vehicle for other flavours. This is enough for an entrée for six people with some bread and some olives.

Buffalo Mozzarella Salad

3 big Australian buffalo mozzarellas

Small plate of plain flour

2 eggs mixed

150g breadcrumbs

3 tablespoons of mixed chopped herbs
(basil, mint, parsley and oregano)

Salt and pepper

2 baby cos lettuce

A few shredded radicchio

A handful of fennel, finely shaved

For The Dressing

2 garlic cloves, crushed

4 tablespoons of verjuice

One small tin of anchovies

3 tablespoons of olive oil

Salt and pepper

Cut the mozzarella into thick slices, dip into the egg mixture then into the flour then back into the egg. Pop the slices on top of the breadcrumbs and herb mixture and pat the breadcrumbs into the mozzarella. Heat a little light olive oil in a frying pan and pan-fry these until brown on both sides. Lift onto the bed of leaves. Spoon the dressing over the top and serve straight away.

To Make The Dressing: mash the garlic with a little salt in a mortar and pestle until you have a puree. Add the anchovies and mush up again. Add the verjuice and olive oil and then season to taste.

Christmas Treats

We are making Dove Biscuits, Mince Tarts and baby Christmas Cakes



Each delicious Christmas cake comes individually packaged with a red silk cord, perfect for hanging on the tree.



Great Christmas Reading

Exit Music by Ian Rankin and *Delizia* by John Dickie

Both these books are excellent. Both contain good writing. *Exit Music* comes from the best crime writer in Scotland. Ian Rankin is finishing off Inspector Rebus, who has been going for many years but still remains fresh (unlike the creations of so many writers, who seem to cash in on a successful character and melt it down book after book). This is no line extension, it is murderous crime set in the heart of Edinburgh. The protagonist is the ageing Inspector Rebus who is one week from retiring at the beginning of this novel. We have plot plus first-class writing so I am in heaven.

With my other hand I am reading *Delizia*, a history of Italian food, also from a crime writer. This time (his first book was about the Italian mafia), he is looking at Italian food from 1154 with pasta and the Planisphere (some kind of map) to Turin in 2006. This book is written in a relaxed manner with not too many of the footnotes that seem to swamp so many history books. There are dates here, but I don't feel like I have to remember them all to enjoy the read — which I certainly have. Did you know the Italians were the first people to adopt the use of the fork? Maybe because of the pasta — John thinks so. Anyone interested in Italian food (not just Tuscany) will learn from this book and remind themselves that Italy is a proud nation that loves its food and that will do a lot to hold onto its tradition. The Italians did not invent pasta, but they took it and created a nation that adores it.

I say Edinburgh rocks and so does Italy, both John and Ian are welcome at my table anytime.

Christmas, Christmas

At Manna from Heaven we are making mince tarts, dove biscuits and baby Christmas cakes. Come and buy them at the growers' markets in November and December, or ring up and place an order for your Christmas goodies. We also have a large Heavenly Tin filled with three varieties of our biscuits.

Due to the success of our children's organic cooking classes we are running one more class for children: 'Cook Your Own Christmas Presents', to include Chocolate Smartie Macaroons, Raspberry Chocolate Creams and Caramel Fudge.

STOP PRESS

This class is now sold out! Ring Leanne for next year's class dates.

Leanne 02 9517 3688



MANNA FROM HEAVEN
HANDMADE IN AUSTRALIA

Sold Out

November & December

I am brushing against jasmine as I walk Olive to school. It is falling over people's walls and fences, the smell is a hint of summer and I am rejoicing. Olive asked me whether gardenias would still be my favourite flower if they did not smell. Her favourite is agapanthus and they do not smell. I felt a little superficial, for although I love gardenias I think it is their smell that has earned my love, not the way they look.

My thoughts are on feasts as we come into this festive time. I look up 'feasts' in *The Oxford Companion to Food* and I quote the line they do: 'hospitality, conviviality and gourmet display'. For me a feast is a welcoming environment with friendly people and yummy food. All meals should be feasts. When a table is draped with fine linen, crystal glasses, Limoges china, silverware and roses, and laden with a long procession of dish after dish of rich food, it might well be a feast for the eye, but it's all too much for me. I prefer a feast without pretension.

When I host a feast at home I try to do a little more than I would normally – not that I want it to be excessive, as so many documented feasts have been. A long time ago, Romans when feasting would retire to the vomitorium, to create some space to eat more. For my sister's twenty-first birthday I cooked a feast. Towards the end of the meal she left the table to visit the bathroom, and came back to eat the delicate little pastries that I had made. I am not sure if she ate too much or drank too much ...

I hate excess in food – next step gluttony – but I do want to be generous and giving. It's a fine line. Also what is a feast to me is not necessarily a feast for another person. I want my guests to feel they are in a space of being spoilt, but not over-indulged, fed but not stuffed, stimulated but not sated, relaxed but inspired. Feasts are often public displays, celebrations that can go on for days. Watch *Monsoon Wedding* or *Babette's Feast*. Surely one of the ultimate feasts is a wedding (sadly the food in these catered affairs is often lacking). Then there is the midnight feast, often clandestine, often involving children (come on, when did you have your last nibble in the night?): feasting on prepared food. Olive's last midnight feast was Kennedy & Wilson milk chocolate and strawberries; I remember mine were often uncooked jelly squares, spoonfuls of honey and pieces of salami, a foul combination.

Here are three feasting menus that I have cooked over the last year: a Christmas Eve feast, a Sunday lunch feast and a midnight feast.

Last Christmas Eve in Sydney...

I had about fifteen people outside on the deck. It was warm but it rained intermittently; everybody had brought lovely wines and champagnes.

Blinis with Tetsuya's Smoked Trout and Horseradish Cream I served this on a big platter outside on my big pink table. I put knife and spoons down and everybody made their own.

Goat's Curd with Slow-Roasted Tomatoes and Oat Cakes This is a perfect combination; I spooned the curd onto a flat plate and then spooned the tomatoes on top. In minutes with everybody helping themselves it looked a mess.

Deep-Fried Stuffed Zucchini Flowers, with Ricotta, Basil and Parmesan In the afternoon Geraldine and I sat down at the table to prepare these delights. When everybody arrived it only took minutes to fry them and I piled them up on a crumpled piece of newspaper. All deep-fried things are feasting things in my book.

For the children I roasted **Chicken pieces with verjuice and garlic**, which I left in the roasting tin alongside a bowl of **Stuffed baked potatoes with cream and herbs**.

I made two loaves of **Flat bread with garlic**, which I served on my wooden chopping board.

On a long platter I put thick wedges of **Filo pastry baked with spinach and feta** alongside a bowl of lukewarm **Caponata**, a sweet-and-sour eggplant and tomato salad.

In a big bowl I made a Hot anchovy, garlic, butter and olive oil dip. There was sourdough and leaves of witlof to dip into it. Everybody double-dipped.

Lots of little **Cakes and Ice cream**.

A Sunday Feast for 8 – 10 People

Crispy Fried Buffalo Mozzarella with Verjuice and Anchovies (see over for recipe) I served it on a large platter and everybody helped themselves.

Ceremonial Tomato Bread shaped into a snake; Olive put olives in for eyes and used sun-dried tomatoes for its tongue and cucumber slices on the top for its scales.

Butterfly Leg of Lamb with Preserved Limes cooked on a bed of sweet potatoes. I marinated the lamb with olives and garlic and cooked it on the rack above the roasting tin of sweet potatoes. All the juices dribbled over the potatoes.

Buttered Couscous on a flat platter with strips of roasted yellow and red capsicum and skinned and French beans.

Greek Yoghurt Sauce with lots of garlic and lemon juice.

For pudding we had a **Chocolate Roulade** – a rolled up rich chocolate confection with raspberries and cream (recipe in last month's Newsletter).



Midnight Feasts

- ✧ A bowl of first pressing Extra Virgin Olive Oil (Carole or Joseph), some home made bread, a little bowl of Maldon salt and some very soft red.
- ✧ A piece of Quick's vintage cheddar with some aged chardonnay.
- ✧ An open tin of Ortiz anchovies with warm garlic bread and some chilled Rosé Bandol wine.
- ✧ A plate of sliced Parma ham with wedges of ripe juicy melon.

Renee Gusefeld



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