

La Tavola Toscana

A Quarterly Newsletter from the *Tuscan Table*
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La Tavola Toscana is a quarterly news letter from The Tuscan Table offering an exciting insight to the sights, smells and tastes of Tuscany.

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Christmas in Tuscany

There is an old Tuscan saying “He who ruins Christmas Eve, has a wolf’s body and the soul of a scoundrel “. It is an admonition to those who do not observe the meatless fast and the kind spirit of the holiday. This day is the frugal beginning of the celebrations up to the Epiphany, January 6 that revolve around the Tuscan Table.

Christmas Eve is a day that Roman Catholics do not eat meat, traditionally there will be a dinner of Seven Fishes. The origin of the number is not quite clear but, it may represent the seven sacraments, seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven deadly sins or seven days of the week. The Vigilia Supper is also a tradition in some households, where thirteen different meatless dishes are presented. Most agree this number of fish in this meal is related to the number of Apostles of Christ

In the Tuscan tradition, Christmas Day Dinner usually starts with a few appetizers or antipasti. These small samples are a great way to bring families together before sitting down to the wonderful Christmas feast. This elaborate meal may commence with a Primo Piatto, a pasta course of Tortellini al Brodo. As the conversation and wine flow, the Secondo Piatto served could be Capon, Pheasant or Faraona (Guinea Fowl). To continue the rhythm, you may expect to be served a bean dish called Fagioli All’Uccelletta followed by a cheese course of Pecorino Toscano with pears. At the point where you have exhausted all your ability to continue, the finale arrives, il Dolce. Holiday sweets are served with Vin Santo or Holy Wine. A wonderful nut tort with the accompaniment of this amber colored desert wine is a perfect way to finish the celebration at the Tuscan Table.

Buon Natale!

From our Table to yours. Holiday Recipes in Tuscany

Please see our website at
www.tuscantable.com
for the full menu and recipes.

Antipasto Toscano

- Crostini di Fegato (Liver Patè)
Lou’s Notes: This is type of Bruschetta found all over Tuscany, especially during the holiday season. A great accompaniment to this toasted appetizer would be Pomini Bianco, a wine from an area near Rufina in Northeastern Tuscany. This crisp white it is made from a blend of Pinot Bianco, Chardonnay and Trebbiano Toscano

Primo Piatto

- Tortellini al Brodo
Lou notes: A traditional pasta recipe for the Christmas holidays in Florence. Although time consuming, this dish is rewarding when made from scratch! Serve with a Chianti outside of the Classico region, they tend to be softer as a general rule.

Secondo Piatto

- Roast Faraona (Guinea Fowl)
Lou’s Notes: A simple, yet succulent winter dish. I recommend serving this bird with a *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*. This dryer red is *DOCG* certified and produced southeast of Siena. It is a wine whose origins date back to the fourteenth century and is a blend of *Sangiovese*, *Canaiolo Nero* and up to 10% white grapes.

Contorno

- Fagioli All’Uccelletta
Lou’s Notes: The *Cannellini* bean is indigenous to Tuscany and a staple of many of the “*Cucina Povera*” recipes.

Formaggio

- Pecorino Toscano
Lou’s Notes: This cheese is made from sheep’s milk and is a standard all over Tuscany. It is married well with a fine *Brunello di Montalcino*. This wine was among the first in Italy to gain the *DOC* status and the very first to gain *DOCG* status. It is produced only within the boundaries of the communal area of *Montalcino* with 100 % *Sangiovese* grapes, known locally as “*Brunello*”. It ages very well, has an intense ruby red color and a slightly tannic taste that mellows with age.

Dolce

- Panforte di Siena
Lou’s Notes: This is not only a traditional recipe around Christmas time but it is also historical. Its roots go back to the 12th century in Siena. Today, this dessert is very common and is produced commercially.



Serve with a glass of *Vin Santo*, a traditional dessert wine that is made from red and white grapes all over Tuscany.

Ingredients:

- 11 oz almonds, peeled and chopped
- 7 oz. walnuts, chopped
- 5 oz peeled roasted hazelnuts, chopped
- 5 oz dried figs, cut into small pieces
- 5 oz each of these candied sweets: citrus peel, grapefruit peel
- 3 ½ Tbsps sweet baking cocoa
- 3 tsps ground cinnamon
- 3 tsps total of a mix of ground cloves, white pepper, mace and coriander
- 2/3 cup good quality honey (about 2/3 cup)
- 7 oz powdered sugar
- thin wafers, enough to cover the bottom of your baking pan, preferably spring-form

Procedure:

In a bowl, combine the almonds, walnuts and hazelnuts; add the figs and candied fruit, sprinkle the cocoa, half of the cinnamon and spices on top, and mix.

In a thick bottomed sauce pan, mix the honey with 3/4 of the powdered sugar. Place over medium heat and slowly stir with a spatula until the mixture begins to thicken and when rubbing a bit of the mixture on the spatula, it turns into a ball.

Remove from the heat; add the fruit and nuts, mixing well. Slightly butter the bottom and sides of your pan to help keep the wafers in place. Add the mixture to your pan, leveling the top with your spatula.

Place the panforte in a 300°F oven for 30 minutes. Let cool, remove from the pan and sprinkle the remaining powdered sugar and cinnamon over the top of the panforte. Keep in a dry place until ready to serve. Serves 12.

Buon Natale !