



PAPPARDELLE WITH DUCK RAGÙ

A forest extends into our land and, in Italy, I discovered that hunters can legally hunt on anyone's property. One morning very soon after we moved into La Fortezza, I wandered into the garden with my espresso and noticed about ten trucks and SUVs parked in the backyard. Lots of guys dressed in olive drab, holding guns, were standing around talking while hunting dogs ran around barking. I quickly called a friend, who explained the laws to me. They can only hunt on certain days, so on Wednesdays they hunt birds—anything that flies. On weekends they can hunt boar. At first I waved and smiled and they seemed startled to see me. Now they hunt regularly on my property in the fall, and then drop off a duck or pheasant or a boar for us, as a gift. Once I got over the shock, it's become a harmonious relationship—except for the ducks! This ragù can be made a day ahead. 🍴 Serves 4

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
4 (1 pound) duck legs
1 teaspoon salt, plus ¼ cup for cooking the pasta
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 small yellow onion, chopped
1 large carrot, chopped
2 stalks celery, chopped
4 ounces cubed speck, or 3 slices bacon, diced

2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 cup red wine
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup beef stock
Basic Egg Pasta Dough (recipe, page 30)
½ cup grated Parmesan cheese, for serving

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

In a 3 quart Dutch oven over medium, heat the oil until shimmering.

Season the duck legs with 1 teaspoon salt and pepper. Add them to the Dutch oven and cook until browned on both sides, about 10 minutes. Remove and set aside. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons of fat from the pot. Add the onion, carrot, celery, speck, rosemary, and oregano and cook on medium heat until the vegetables are soft and the onions are translucent, about 10 minutes. Deglaze with the wine, scraping all the browned bits from the bottom of the pot, and cook until the liquid is slightly reduced, about 3 to 5 minutes. Add the garlic, seared duck legs, and stock. Cover and bake for 1 hour 30 minutes.

While the meat is roasting, make the pasta dough, roll it out, and cut it into ½ inch wide pappardelle noodles.

Remove the duck legs from the Dutch oven. Let them cool enough to handle, then use a fork to pull the meat off the bone and shred (you can also use your hands to shred; this is my preferred method). Return the duck meat to the sauce and place on the cooktop over low heat to keep warm.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil, salt it with the remaining ¼ cup salt, add the pappardelle, and cook until al dente, about 5 minutes. Remove with a spider strainer. Place the pasta on a large platter and serve topped with the ragù and Parmesan.

BASIC EGG PASTA DOUGH

*This is our basic pasta dough recipe; I use it consistently in all of our pasta recipes. Here at La Fortezza, rolling out pasta by hand takes about 10 to 15 minutes and is a great workout, plus it's meditative and very satisfying. You can, of course, use a machine; this recipe shares both techniques. 🍝 **Makes dough for 4 servings of pasta***

1 ½ cups all-purpose flour, or you may substitute 00 flour, plus more for dusting

½ teaspoon salt

2 large eggs, plus 4 egg yolks

Semolina or corn flour, for tossing

Sift the flour and salt into a large mixing bowl. Make a well in the middle of the flour, add the eggs, and whisk them into the flour with a fork, gradually incorporating the walls of the flour into the well to form the dough. Turn it out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead the dough for 5 to 10 minutes, until it is smooth. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap, and refrigerate at least 30 minutes, or up to 4 hours, before rolling out—any longer and you risk the dough oxidizing and turning a dark color.

With a Pasta Machine: Set the pasta machine rollers on their widest setting. Cut the pasta dough into quarters. Lightly dust one quarter with flour and press it into a rectangle that's almost the width of the rollers, about 5 inches wide. You'll want to maintain this width as you roll by trimming the edges with a knife. Cover the remaining three pieces with plastic to keep from drying out.

First, feed the dough through the machine, and fold the dough in half. Repeat twice.

Then adjust the machine, set the rollers one notch thinner each time you roll the dough through until you are rolling the pasta dough on the thinnest setting. Trim the two ends with a knife so that

they are straight, and put on a lightly floured surface. Now your dough is ready to shape into many types of pasta.

One tip: When you are rolling out your dough, try to use as little excess flour as possible as the flour will dry out your dough.

Rolling Pasta by Hand: Dust a wooden board or work surface with 1 tablespoon flour. Unwrap the chilled dough from the plastic wrap and flatten it with a rolling pin. Roll out the dough into a thin round sheet, less than ⅛ inch thick—you should be able to hold the sheet up to light and see the light through it.

Note: To make tagliatelle or pappardelle, cut the pasta sheet into 5-inch-wide strips, then roll each strip like a jelly roll into a 3 by 5-inch-long log. Trim the ends of the roll to make them straight. Cut into strips, depending on what type of pasta you're forming, starting on the right side of the log. Then toss the circles of pasta nests into semolina or corn flour, unfurling them into pasta nests. Continue down the log until you have 5 or 6 nests.

Notes on Cooking Pasta

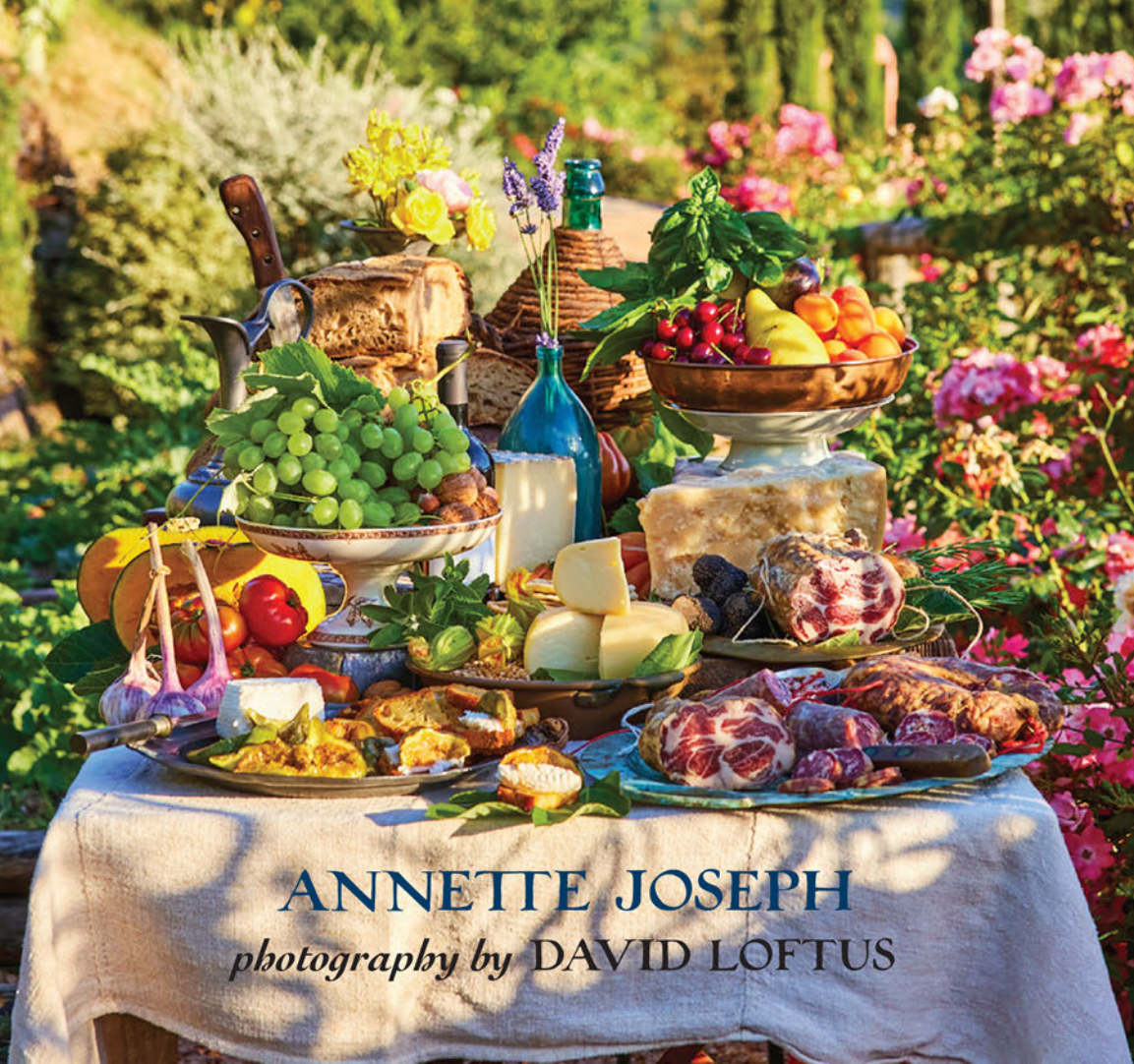
I have learned to throw two handfuls of salt, about ¼ cup, into a large pot of pasta to make the water “taste like the sea,” according to Italians. Don't be afraid, the pasta doesn't take on all of the salt flavor, it just makes it cook better for some reason. Pull the pasta from the pot with a spider strainer rather than pouring it into a colander because the starch content will coagulate if it sits for a few minutes and cause the pasta to stick together. Also, never rinse the pasta, because it removes the starch. Put the pasta directly into the warm pan or bowl of sauce and toss.

The starch needs to stay on the pasta so that the sauce clings to it and the flavor is absorbed.



AT THE TABLE OF LA FORTEZZA

The Enchantment of Tuscan Cooking
from the Lunigiana Region



ANNETTE JOSEPH
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