

MARIA'S

FRICO

Cheese Potato Pancake from Friuli-Venezia Giulia

This dish is one of those splendid "throw nothing away" recipes that's been in existence since the Middle Ages. Traditional *frico* consists of potatoes, onions, and Montasio cheese; this is a semi-hard cow's cheese produced mainly in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. And *frico* is a way of using up the leftover bits of cheese (called "*strissulis*" in Italian); for example rinds, or the scraps produced from pushing curds into cheese molds. Thus the flavor of frico will depend what stage in the production of Montasio the cheese comes from. And of course, recipes will also vary from village to village.

Eighty-eight-year-old Maria's version uses very fresh cheese and she opts for chives and parsley, not onions. The secret, she says, is to use grated raw potatoes rather than boiled ones, to stop the dish from becoming too heavy and absorbing excessive fat.

If you cannot find Montasio, use Asiago, Parmigiano, Grana Padano, mozzarella, or a mixture of them, instead. It becomes a frico-inspired recipe, and will still taste great. If you are using mozzarella, make sure it's the dry "put it on pizza" kind. These days, cooks also add other ingredients, like diced speck, to the mixture. Traditionally an early meal for farm laborers, you can serve frico warm as a *merenda* (afternoon snack), with a green salad, or as an accompaniment at any time of day.

Serves 4 as a snack
2 as a main course

7oz (200g) young Montasio cheese
1lb 2oz (500g) waxy potatoes
3 tablespoons sunflower oil or lard
1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives
1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
Sea salt

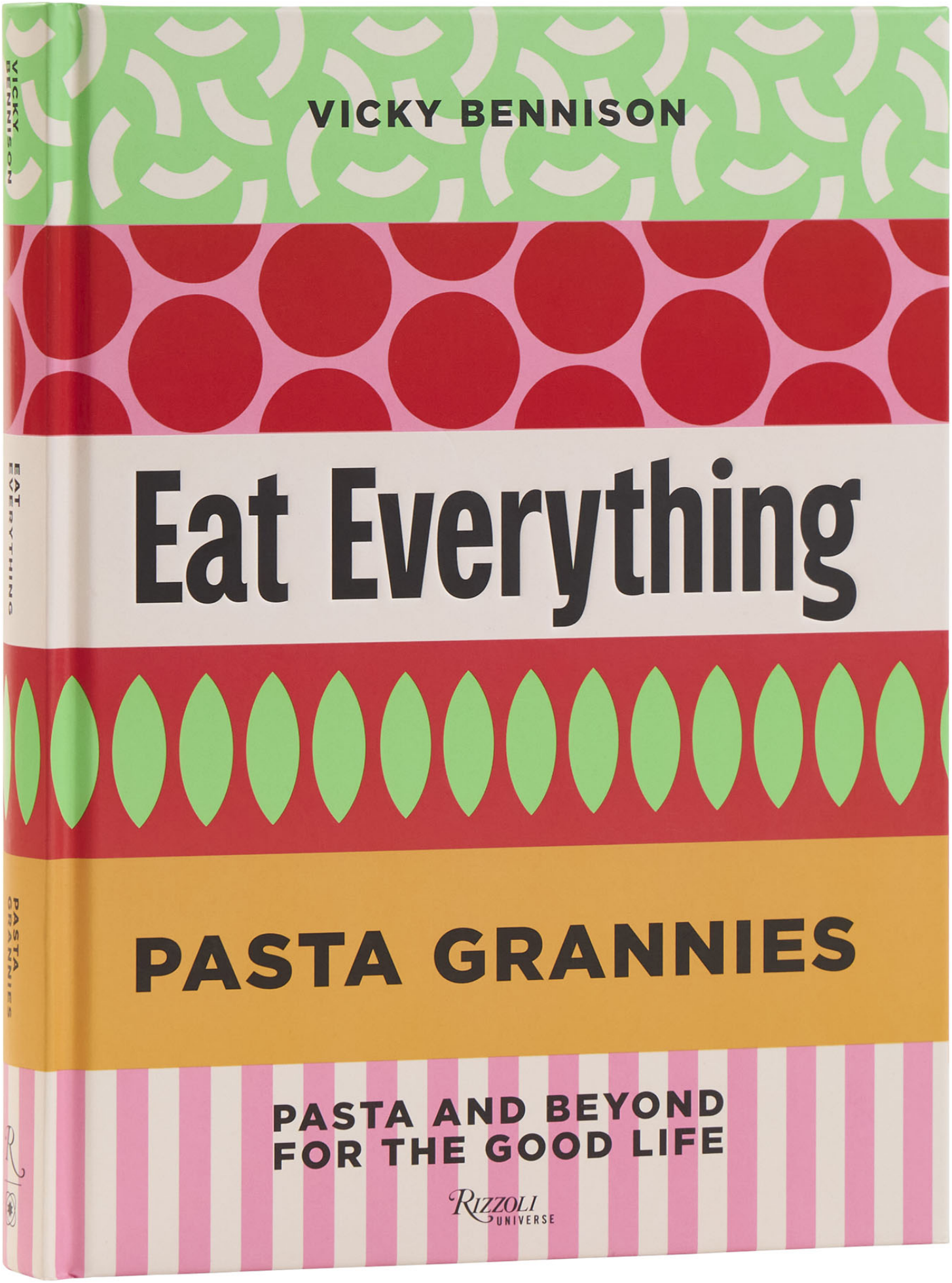
Grate the cheese using the large holes of a box grater and set aside. Peel the potatoes and grate them as well.

Heat the oil in a 10-inch (25-cm) non-stick skillet (frying pan) over medium heat. Add the grated potatoes and season generously with salt. Cook the potatoes until they soften but do not brown, stirring constantly to prevent sticking. This takes ages, and the more starch there is in the potatoes, the longer it will take. Allow a good 20 minutes. Add a few tablespoons of water to help the potatoes cook evenly and prevent sticking, and continue stirring and cooking until the potatoes form a sticky mass.

When the potatoes have softened completely, add the cheese and continue stirring as the cheese slowly melts and incorporates with the potato mixture. Add the chopped chives and parsley, stirring them through while the frico is still soft enough to incorporate them.

Cook until the mixture comes together like an omelet, then carefully toss or flip to color the other side. Continue cooking until the *frico* is golden on both sides and the potatoes are completely cooked through; this will take a good 30 minutes to achieve. To give it a proper crust, you might need to turn the heat up at the very end to brown the surface.

To serve, slide the *frico* onto a cutting board and cut into wedges.


VICKY BENNISON
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