

BUONA DOMENICA

Scrippelle 'Mbusse | Crespelle in Brodo **Crêpes in Broth**

Eggs and pecorino cheese are paired together in many Abruzzese dishes, a reflection of the region's pastoral heritage. Here, the two meet in a nourishing soup of delicate crêpes simmered in homemade broth. It's hard to imagine, on a cold, snowy night, a dish more appetizing than this one: rich, yet delicate, the broth and crêpes glowing golden beneath a soft, snowy shower of grated cheese.

Be sure to warm your bowls in a low oven before serving; this will keep the scrippelle and broth from cooling too quickly as you serve them.

Makes 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

6 large eggs

1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt

Scant 1 1/4 cups (150 g) unbleached all-purpose flour

1 1/2 cups (350 ml) water

Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg (optional)

8 to 9 cups (2 L) homemade chicken broth

Butter for the pan

About 2 cups (180 g) finely grated Pecorino Romano cheese (use a microplane)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Crack the eggs into a bowl and add the salt. Whisk well to completely break up and combine the eggs. Whisk in the flour, once again whisking vigorously to smooth out any lumps. Gradually pour in the water, whisking as you pour. Grate a small amount of nutmeg into the batter and stir. Let the batter rest for 30 minutes.

2. In a saucepan, bring the broth to a simmer over medium heat.

3. While the broth is heating, make the crêpes. Set an 8-inch or 9-inch (20-cm or 23-cm) nonstick or well-seasoned cast-iron skillet over medium heat and film the bottom with butter. The butter should sizzle upon contact with the pan. Wipe the bottom of the pan with paper towel to distribute the butter and remove any excess; too much butter will prevent the crêpe from forming properly.

4. Pour in a small ladleful of crêpe batter into the hot pan—about 3 tablespoons (45 ml) if you are using an 8-inch (20-cm) pan and a scant 1/4 cup (60 ml) if you are using a 9-inch (23-cm) pan—and quickly tilt the pan around so that the batter coats the bottom, forming a thin pancake. Cook for about 30 seconds, or until just set—the batter will go from shiny to dull as it cooks, and you may see a few bubbles forming beneath the surface. Using a small offset spatula, lift up the edge of the crêpe and use your fingers to carefully flip it over. Or slide a large, wide angled spatula under the crêpe and carefully flip it, smoothing out any wrinkles or folds that form. Cook for another 20 seconds or so, until just done. The crêpe should be fully set but not brown. Transfer the crêpe to a large plate.

Continue making crêpes until you have used all the batter, adding butter to the pan as needed to prevent sticking. Stack the crêpes on the plate as you go (you don't need to put anything between them; they won't stick together). You should end up with 24 (8-inch/20-cm) or 18 (9-inch/23-cm) crêpes. Don't worry if you don't get that many the first few times you try; it takes practice to get that many crêpes from the batter.

5. Sprinkle a little pecorino—about 2 tablespoons—on each crêpe and roll into a cigar shape. As the crêpes are rolled, place them, seam side down, in warm shallow bowls or soup plates, 3 or 4 crêpes in each bowl.

6. Ladle hot broth over the crêpes—they don't need to be completely immersed—and sprinkle a little more pecorino cheese on top. Serve hot hot hot!

TIPS FOR MAKING SCRIPPELLE 'MBUSSE

Making these thin crêpes is not especially difficult, but it can be a little tricky. Here are some tips to help you master the process. Don't worry if you don't get it right the first time. With a little practice you'll be turning out light, velvety crêpes.

Broth: There is no point in making scrippelle ‘mbusse without homemade broth because the broth is everything here. The crêpes absorb it like sponges—think of the dish’s name, “infused crêpes.” Homemade broth takes time, but it is easy and worth it. It’s a good stay-inside project for a cold or rainy Saturday or Sunday. Make a lot and freeze it so you’ll have it at the ready when you want to make scrippelle!

[Here’s my basic homemade broth recipe.](#) This recipe contains beef marrow bones; if you’d like straight chicken broth, leave out the bones. You can embellish the broth with a little orange peel and cinnamon, as Le Virtù chef Massimo does. Or, if you have a homemade broth recipe that you love, use that instead.

Eggs: Find a good source for eggs if possible. I buy eggs at the farmers’ market when I can. Not only do they taste better (in my opinion), but they also tend to have more nutritional value than mass-produced supermarket eggs. If you’re lucky, you might find eggs with deep orange yolks, the sort you see in Italy (Italians call the yolk “il rosso,” or “the red”). A “red” yolk doesn’t necessarily make the egg better; color is determined by the laying hen’s diet. But deep-colored yolks will make prettier, golden-hued crêpes.

Mixing the batter: Beat the eggs first. Then sprinkle in the flour, whisking vigorously until all the lumps have been worked out of the batter. **If you want to be extra-cautious, you can sift the flour into the eggs.** Once the mixture is smooth, add the water, a little at a time, until you have a loose pourable batter, like thin cream. If you have a stand blender or a Vitamix, you can use it instead of a whisk, but it’s just one more appliance to clean up.

The pan: You need a nonstick pan to make the crêpes. I use either a well-seasoned (I’m talking 70+ years of seasoning) cast-iron pan or an everyday nonstick pan. You don’t need a fancy crêpe pan (remember those?). Either an 8-inch (20-cm) or a 9-inch (23-cm) works here.

Buttering the pan: The bottom of the pan should be coated with a very light film of fat. The most traditional Teramana recipes use pork fat to grease the pan, which is what my friend Elvira uses. It adds a hint of smokiness to the flavor of the scrippelle. I use butter because I always have it on hand. I take half a stick of butter, still in its wrapper, and rub the end of the stick around the bottom of the heated pan, then use a paper towel to evenly coat the pan and wipe out any excess. Too much butter will prevent the crêpe from properly forming. Towards the end of making the crêpes, the paper towel will be pretty saturated with butter, and you can just use that to grease the bottom of the pan.

Essential tools: A small, angled spatula is indispensable for lifting the edge of the crêpe from the pan in order to turn it. The other essential tools are your fingers (see Flipping the crêpe).

Pouring the batter: This is the trickiest part of making scrippelle. The batter must be thin enough to flow around the entire bottom of the pan. I use a 1/4-cup measuring cup to pour the batter directly into the hot pan, then I immediately lift and tilt the pan around to distribute the batter evenly. You might get a few thicker trails of batter here and there, but things tend to even out when you flip the crêpe. Scrippelle should not brown, so flip the crêpe as soon as it is set—after about 30 seconds.

Flipping the crêpe: Theoretically, a long, wide spatula should work. But it doesn't always flip the crêpe neatly and then you find yourself trying to adjust it and smooth out wrinkles and folds. This can be tricky, and you risk tearing the crêpe. **The best way I've found is to lift up the edge of the crêpe with your angled spatula; then use the fingers of both hands to quickly turn the crêpe over.** There's a little heat involved, but I've never burned myself and I've found nothing works better than my own fingers (people forget what essential tools our hands are in the kitchen).

Assembling the crêpes: Just a tablespoon or two of finely grated Pecorino (or Parmigiano) cheese is all you want for each crêpe. Sprinkle it over the entire surface and then roll the crêpe up like a cigar.

Serving: Lay the prepared crêpes in warmed soup plates and ladle boiling broth over them. The broth really should be boiling to properly warm the crêpes and soften the cheese; and warmed plates will keep the broth from cooling down too quickly.