

CHERRY BOMBE

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CONTRIBUTORS' Q:

what is
your dream
food project?



A: A full-time paid sabbatical
to travel the world and learn
about different cultural cuisines.

—Jenn Louis, ringleader, mom
to three cats, wife, chef/owner of
Lincoln Restaurant and Sunshine
Tavern, and author of *Pasta by Hand*,
Portland, Oregon

BROS

FROM SCRATCH

HOW TO MAKE GNOCCHI BY HAND

by Jenn Louis

TIPS FOR MAKING GREAT GNOCCHI:

1. Use a scale to measure ingredients! You will have excellent consistency if you use a scale. Each person measures ingredients a little differently in a measuring cup, which can cause widely varying results. Having a simple kitchen scale that measures in grams will make all the difference.
2. Measure carefully, but trust your senses. There are many variables when making gnocchi: Some eggs are slightly larger than others; some days you need to add more flour than usual; some stoves run hotter than others. It's important to measure precisely, but it's equally important to recognize when the dough is too dry or sticky. Be ready to make adjustments to achieve the proper consistency.
3. When combining dough ingredients, Italian cooks traditionally mound the flour on a work surface and form a well in the center to hold the wet ingredients before drawing the flour into them. This method works perfectly and certainly has stood the test of time. When mixing dough myself, I put the ingredients in a bowl and use my hands or the hook attachment of a stand mixer, so this approach essentially mimics the traditional well method. I have found the results to be just as good as the traditional method.
4. Pay special attention to the mixing and cooking directions.
5. Test your dough. When making dumplings, take one or two and put them in the simmering water. If they fall apart, add a bit more flour. You want just enough flour to prevent the dumplings from falling apart while cooking, and no more.
6. Ideally, dumplings are best eaten the day they are made. If you want to store them, remove excess flour and cover with an additional piece of parchment paper, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate. Many types of dumplings can be frozen for up to one month. To do so, freeze them on a parchment-lined baking sheet and, once frozen, transfer to an airtight container, such as a re-sealable plastic bag. When cooking frozen dumplings, always cook them directly from the freezer.
7. When measuring portions of most types of uncooked dumplings, we use a very specialized portioning tool at Lincoln [Louis' restaurant in Portland, Oregon]: a teacup! When

we opened the restaurant, we started using a teacup, which is really just one cup, because the coffee station is next to the pasta station and all the teacups are right there, easy and accessible. We use a heaping cup for dumplings that have a simple sauce or a scant cup for dumplings that have a rich meat sauce.

8. Cook your gnocchi in abundantly seasoned—in other words, salted—water at a gentle simmer. I like to think of the water as the seasoning of the pasta dough. As the water is absorbed by the dumpling as it cooks, the salt brings out the flavor of the dumpling. The water should be seasoned, but not salty. Simmer, do not boil. You should have moving bubbles, not a rapid boil, which can break apart your dumplings.

9. Don't overcook. Aim for al dente—that is, tender but still firm to the bite. Al dente literally translates as “to the tooth.” I like to say that dumplings should have some toothiness but not stick in your molars. Most ricotta and potato gnocchi should be removed from simmering water when they start to bob and rise to the top of the pot. If your dumplings cook for too long, they will absorb too much water and become dense and overly chewy. In general, dumplings cook for no more than two or three minutes. Frozen dumplings will require another one or two minutes.

10. Use a slotted spoon to remove your poached dumplings from the water, and finish cooking them by gently simmering them in warm sauce for one minute. If your sauce is too thick, add two tablespoons of the pasta cooking water to it.

11. For most dumplings, the sauce is not merely a dressing. The addition of sauce is actually the final step in completing the dish, because the dumplings are cooked briefly in the pan with the prepared sauce.

NOTHING IS PERFECT. These are wonderful handmade dumplings, and they should look like it. Don't worry about them being perfectly shaped. They should be rustic, toothsome, and comforting—and that's perfect enough.

BEET AND RICOTTA GNOCCHI

Servings: 6 to 8

These beautiful gnocchi show off a rich red color. The flavor is earthy but not intensely beet-y, and the texture is soft and delicate.

- 2½ pounds (1.2 kilograms) red beets without greens, trimmed
- kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup (60 milliliters) water
- 1 egg
- 1 cup (240 grams) whole-milk ricotta cheese
- 1 cup (90 grams) finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
- freshly grated nutmeg
- 3 cups (420 grams) all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- semolina flour for dusting
- sauce of your choice



Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Place the beets in a baking dish large enough to hold them in a single layer. Season lightly with salt and pepper, drizzle with the olive oil, and add the water. Cover the baking dish tightly with aluminum foil and roast until the beets can be easily pierced with a skewer, 40 to 60 minutes. Remove from the oven, uncover, and set aside to cool. When cool enough to handle, slip the skins off the beets with your fingers or a paring knife. Cut the beets into large chunks.

In a blender or the bowl of a food processor, combine the beets and egg and process until very smooth.

In a large bowl or the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, combine 340 grams or 1½ cups of the beet purée, the ricotta cheese, Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, a few swipes of nutmeg, and 1 tablespoon salt. Mix with your hands or on medium speed until fully combined. Scrape down the sides of the bowl. Add the all-purpose flour and knead with your hands or on low speed just until combined. Do not overmix, as this will make the gnocchetti tough. The dough should be soft and slightly sticky.

Dust 70 grams or ½ cup all-purpose flour on the work surface, then scrape the dough from the bowl directly on top of the flour. Lightly dust the top of the dough with more all-purpose flour.

Cover the dough with plastic wrap and let rest at room temperature for 30 minutes.

Line two baking sheets with parchment paper and dust with semolina flour. Cut off a chunk of dough about the width of two fingers and leave the rest covered with plastic wrap. On a work surface very lightly dusted with all-purpose flour, use your hands to roll the chunk into a log about ½ inch or 12 millimeters in diameter. Cut the log into ¼-inch or 6-millimeter pieces. Put the gnocchetti on the prepared baking sheets and shape the remaining dough. Make sure that the gnocchetti don't touch or they will stick together.

(To store, refrigerate on baking sheets, covered with plastic wrap, for up to 2 days, or freeze on the sheets and transfer to an airtight container. Use within one month. Do not thaw before cooking.)

Bring a large pot filled with generously salted water to a simmer over medium-high heat. Add the gnocchetti and simmer until they float to the surface, 1 to 3 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and finish with your choice of sauce. Serve right away.

From Pasta by Hand, by Jenn Louis. Published by Chronicle Books. Photo by Ed Anderson.