



Cooking with  
*Viola Fuitoni*

## **Italy by Ingredient: Prosciutto and Mortadella** **10/28/2021**

Salumi – cured meats – are such a part of the Italian diet to have a dedicated drawer in many refrigerators.

Salumi are almost always made with pork, though there are specialties that use beef, goose, duck, wild boar and even lamb. Salt is the curing agent common to all salumi, different flavors like herbs, spices or wine distinguish the different kinds. Most are air dried, a few are boiled, roasted, or in a salt brine. Smoking isn't common but it does appear in a few hyperlocal specialties.

Their unfailing pop of flavor is great in a sandwich, it makes a lovely aperitivo, and can even be the quick go-to protein in a meal short on preparation time but long in flavor. But their secret superpower is the depth they bring to cooking. Open any Italian cookbook or cooking magazine and you will find a bevy of recipes that uses salumi to achieve next level flavor. In fact I have been teaching classes about cooking with salumi since I brought my Italian food knowledge to the classroom.

The character, shape, and even the nomenclature of many salumi changes from region to region, but some have national following and have become worldwide synonyms with Italian cuisine like prosciutto and mortadella, our guests for tonight's installment of Italy by Ingredient. These two well loved and readily available products exist at opposite ends of the meat curing spectrum.

Prosciutto is produced with a minimally invasive process. It starts with a breed of pig which is carefully selected for the size of its hind legs and fed a diet that focuses on the character it imparts to the fat. After the hind legs are harvested and properly salted, curemasters must rely on the ability to corral air and time.

Even with such deceptively simple process, prosciutto produced in different regions can have wildly different profile. In the US we all know the buttery sweet, wide, thin slices of Parma or San Daniele. But ask this Umbrian about her ideal prosciutto and you might be surprised to hear of oak scented, peppery narrow slices that must be absolutely be hand cut at a thinness closer to that of a thick poster than a sheet of paper.



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Mortadella mixes both prime parts and lesser cuts and relies on added fat for added flavor. It is heavily spiced, finely ground, shaped into a casing and cooked at very controlled temperatures. The transformation is faster and a skillful curemasters knows how to best balance fat to lean meat, determine the size of fat cubes and develop their own signature spice blends.

The elaborate mortadella process was created in Bologna and already codified by the XVI century and it's still the best and most beloved. It even survived a period of attempts to its virtues. When food production became automated, unscrupulous makers added ingredients that stretched both the volume and shelf life of mortadella and made at once cheaper to the consumer and much more lucrative to the maker. Today mortadella is still less expensive than most other salumi, but consumers are savvy and more exacting, and happy to pay a little more for transparency and quality. To make sure you are getting the best of the best, look for the IGP blue and gold brand on mortadella di Bologna.

Prosciutto and mortadella have infinite uses in cooking: you can collect prosciutto fat to flavor your cooking, save and boil its hide for a great pasta e fagioli, mix it with your vegetable stir fry. For great meatballs, grind some mortadella into the meat. And if you ever are lucky enough to try mortadella deep fried, I promise that you will never want to be a vegetarian.

Today, I am presenting recipes using prosciutto and mortadella that are easy enough for a weeknight family dinner but can also impress a tableful of dinner guests.



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### **Mousse di mortadella con pistacchi di Bronte e balsamico tradizionale**

Mortadella mousse with Sicilian pistachios and traditional balsamic

for 1 pint

3 TBSP pistachios  
1/3 cup ricotta  
1 cup diced mortadella  
2 TBSP parmigiano  
1/4 cup heavy cream  
black pepper and nutmeg to taste  
good balsamic vinegar as needed  
baguette

Immerse the pistachios in boiling water for 90 seconds. Drain and immerse in iced water to loosen the skin. Peel the pistachios and chop them finely.

Push the ricotta through a fine sieve. Place the mortadella and ricotta in the food processor bowl and grind into a homogeneous mixture.

Transfer to a bowl. Mix in the parmigiano and the pistachios. Whip the cream to soft peaks and fold it into the ricotta and mortadella mixture. Season with nutmeg and black pepper and stir in 1 teaspoon of balsamic. Taste and make sure it suits your palate. Adjust if needed.

The mousse is meant for crostini. Since mortadella and balsamic have very decisive flavor profiles, use an unobtrusive bread, baguette is ideal.

Slice the baguette at a slight slant in 1/4" thick slices. Lightly toast the slices and spread a generous layer of mortadella mousse on them. Top with a few drops of balsamic. If you wish to go the extra mile, you can garnish with a half pistachio and a leave of chervil.



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### **Involtini al prosciutto di Parma e fontina valdostana**

Meat rolls with prosciutto di Parma and fontina

A note on involtini: they are little rolled packages of something (generally meat, but sometimes fish and even vegetables). You can choose a specific filling, as we are doing today, but they can be a vehicle to use up the leftover bits from your refrigerator. I like to serve 2 smallish involtini rather than just one big one, not only do they look better on the plate, they also will cook faster and stay more tender and moist.

for 4 people

4 1/4" thick cutlets of your choice of meat (see shopping notes for details)  
salt and pepper as needed  
8 slices prosciutto  
1/2 cup shredded fontina  
8 sage leaves  
2 tablespoons flour  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
2 tablespoons butter  
1 cup white wine  
1 small black truffle (optional)

Place the cutlets between 2 sheets of parchment paper and pound them with a meat mallet until they are between 1/16" and 1/8". Divide each cutlet in two pieces. Season each piece with salt and pepper on both sides and lay on a board. On each cutlet, lay a slice of prosciutto and sprinkle some fontina.

Starting with the long side perpendicular to you and fold in about 1/4" on the bottom and sides, then roll fairly tightly all the way. Secure with a toothpick, affixing a sage leaf.

Lightly dredge each involtino through flour then shake off excess flour to leave barely a dusting behind.

Pour the olive oil in a skillet and place over medium heat. When the fragrance of the oil wafts to your nose without you bending over the stove, add the butter.



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When it is melted into a lowly sizzling foam, raise the heat to medium and add the involtini.

Lightly brown the involtini all around. Shower with the white wine and when the acidity of the alcohol no longer punches your nose but it is the sweetness that caresses your eyes, cover and cook on medium low heat for about 5 minutes.

Transfer to a warm platter and douse with the pan sauce. If using, shave the truffle all over the involtini and serve right away.



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## **SHOPPING**

For traditional balsamic and Sicilian DOP pistachios, go to [gustiamo.com](http://gustiamo.com) their products are the best available and you can use [gustilovesviola](http://gustilovesviola.com) to get a 10% discount on your order.

Fontina is fairly easy to find, look for the valdostana, the one still made in its place of birth, Valdaosta. If you have trouble, use another melty flavorful cheese like gubere, Swiss, provolone, etc etc.

The involtini recipe is originally with veal, a meat not always easily available in the Bay Area. I have found wonderful 4th generation ranchers who sell their responsibly raised and harvested veal at the San Rafael Sunday market, the name of the family is Rossotti and they sell already sliced and pounded cutlets. If you prefer not to have veal or do not have the time to travel to Marin for it, no worries as this recipe can be made with other meats (see note below next to the meat line on the shopping list).

### **Produce**

- 8 sage leaves
- 1 small black truffle (optional)

### **Protein**

- 1 cup diced mortadella
- 8 slices prosciutto
- 4 1/4" thick cutlets of your choice of meat (NOTE: chicken or turkey from the breast, beef from the rump, pork from butt or loin – loin slices are pretty small so get 8)

### **Dairy**

- 1/3 cup ricotta
- 2 TBSP parmigiano
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup shredded fontina (NOTE: other melty flavorful cheese will work)
- 2 tablespoons butter



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### **Miscellaneous**

- 3 TBSP pistachios (Sicilian are best but expensive, so feel free to use other pistachio but make sure they are raw and unsalted)
- 2 tablespoons flour
- balsamic vinegar (NOTE: traditional is best, or pick a viscous older balsamic)
- 1 cup white wine
- 1/2 a baguette
- salt
- pepper
- extra virgin olive oil

### **EQUIPMENT**

- well washed hands
- apron
- 2 to 3 kitchen rags
- cutting board
- chef's knife, paring knife, bread knife
- 1 large bowl for refuse
- 5 to 6 small and medium prepping bowls
- 12" skillet or sauté pan
- small sauce pan
- food processor (handheld blender can also work)
- sieve (not necessary but helpful)
- silicon spatula
- meat mallet (or rolling pin or can of beans)
- tongs
- wooden spoons
- zester
- toothpicks
- tasting spoons
- 2 serving platters

### **PREPPING**

- print and read all recipes
- pull ingredients and group according to recipes
- pull equipment and have close at hand
- shred fontina and grate parmigiano (if needed)