

# Polenta with Meatballs, Tomato Sauce, and Sautéed Greens

*Recipe adapted from A School Food Revolution, Alice Waters' forthcoming school food manifesto*

Everyone loves meatballs! These are served with baked cheesy polenta and sauteed winter greens. Polenta is a versatile and appealing base for many winter dishes. It is easily made ahead, cooled and then baked, fried, or grilled for serving. We like to add garlicky greens which are sweet and nutritious in the colder weather. This is the time of year to serve cooking greens to kids-when they are at their most delicious.

## Meatballs and Tomato Sauce

### Ingredients

*approximately 30 meatballs (1 1/4 inch)*

1 pound ground pork  
2 teaspoons kosher salt  
1/4 teaspoon fresh-ground black pepper  
1 cup torn pieces of day-old country-style bread, crusts removed  
1/2 cup milk  
1 small onion  
1 garlic clove  
2 tablespoons chopped parsley  
1 tablespoon chopped marjoram or oregano  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 egg  
1 1/2 quarts Tomato Sauce

### Directions

1. Put the meat in a bowl and season with salt and pepper. Combine the bread and milk in a small bowl and set aside to soften. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Peel the onion and grate using the large-holed side of a box grater. Peel the garlic clove and pound to a paste in a small mortar with a pinch of salt. Add the onion, garlic, chopped herbs, and olive oil to the meat. Squeeze most of the milk out of the bread and add the bread to the meat mixture along with the egg.
3. Combine the ingredients with your hands, gently but thoroughly; or put the mixture in the bowl of a stand mixer and mix on low speed with a paddle attachment. Use a small ice cream scoop or a spoon to form the mixture into balls. Place them on a

rimmed baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake the meatballs until cooked through, about 20 minutes. Turn the pan midway for even browning.

4. When ready to serve, heat the tomato sauce, add the meatballs and bring to a simmer. Spoon the meatballs and sauce over warm Polenta.

### Variations

—Use a combination of turkey or chicken and pork, or beef and pork, or all beef in place of the pork.

—Add other chopped herbs such as cilantro, mint, sage, or thyme, in whatever combination you like.

—Add 1/4 cup grated Parmesan or pecorino cheese to the mixture.

—Substitute cold, cooked rice or potato for the soaked breadcrumbs.

—Serve with grated Parmesan or pecorino cheese sprinkled over the meatballs.

## Tomato Sauce

### Ingredients

*Makes 2 quarts*

1 yellow onion

2 garlic cloves

½ bunch basil (1 cup leaves)

3 tablespoons olive oil

Pinch dried red chile flakes

7 cups canned tomato purée (two 28-ounce cans)

2 tablespoons kosher salt

### Directions:

1. Peel and finely dice the onion. Peel and mince the garlic. Pick the basil leaves from the stems and roughly chop. Heat a heavy-bottomed pot hot over medium-low heat and add the olive oil, onions, garlic, chile flakes, and basil. Cook for 10 to 15 minutes until the onions are tender.
2. Add the tomato purée, salt, and 2 cups water and simmer for 20 minutes.
3. Store extra tomato sauce in the refrigerator for up to 1 week or freeze.

## Polenta

Polenta is ground corn cooked in boiling water until thickened and tender. Although it thickens after a few minutes of cooking, long slow simmering allows its full corn flavor to develop. It can be served soft or firm. When first cooked, soft polenta is great with sauces

and vegetables and meats, such as sausages and meatballs. Cooked polenta that is allowed to cool and firm is versatile and can be cut into shapes and fried, grilled, or baked, topped with sauces, cheese, a fried egg, sautéed vegetables, whatever you like.

### **Ingredients**

*Makes 2 quarts*

2 quarts water  
2 cups polenta  
2 teaspoons salt  
6 tablespoons butter or olive oil  
1 cup grated Parmesan cheese

### **Directions:**

1. Bring the water to a boil in a heavy-bottomed pot. Whisk in the polenta and salt. Turn down the heat and stir constantly until the polenta is suspended in the water and no longer settles to the bottom of the pot.
2. Cook for 1 hour, stirring occasionally, at a bare simmer. It should have a creamy, pourable consistency; add water if the polenta gets too thick.
3. Stir in the butter and cheese. Taste and add more salt if needed (Be careful when tasting the polenta; it is very hot.) Keep warm until ready to serve—covered on very low heat or over another pan of simmering water—or spread it out on an oiled rimmed baking sheet and let cool.
4. If you like, cut the cool firm polenta in triangles or other shapes, place on a parchment paper-lined sheet pan, moisten with olive oil, and reheat in a hot oven, or fry in a film of olive oil in a cast-iron skillet.

### **Variations:**

- Sauté 2 cups fresh corn kernels for 4 minutes, season with salt, and stir into the polenta.
- Replace the Parmesan cheese with grana, fontina, pecorino, or cheddar cheese.

## **Sauteed Chard**

### **Ingredients**

*Makes 5 to 6 cups*

2 large bunches of rainbow, red or green chard  
1 yellow onion  
4 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced  
¼ cup olive oil  
Kosher salt

**Directions**

1. Pull the chard leaves from the ribs. Trim the ends from the ribs and then cut the upper tender portions into thin slices. Wash the leaves thoroughly and drain. Stack the leaves and cut them into wide ribbons. Peel and dice the onions.
2. Heat the olive oil in a heavy-bottomed pan. Add the onions and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally until soft, about 5 minutes, adding the sliced garlic near the end of the cooking time.
3. Add the chard ribs and continue cooking for 3 to 5 minutes. Add the chard leaves and season with salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the leaves are tender. Add a splash of water if the pan gets dry and the onions begin to stick and brown.

**Variations:**

- Add 1 or 2 minced garlic cloves and a pinch of red chile flakes to the softened onions before adding the chard.
- If you prefer, sauté just the leaves without the ribs.
- Cook other leafy greens such as beet greens, various kinds of kale, broccolini and broccoli rabe in the same manner. Boil sturdier leaves (kales) for a few minutes to soften before adding to the onions.