**The FOOD of NAPLES and CAMPANIA**

As in any part of Italy, Neapolitans are very passionate and quite opinionated about their cuisine.  The food of Campania is as exuberant as its natives. The heartier food of Northern Italy is well known for its prosciutto, parmigiano, and balsamico ingredients. What is known as ‘**Mediterranean Cuisine’**, and that which is much healthier for us, is from the Southern part of Italy, including the food of Naples and Campania. The cooking of this region aims to preserve the flavors of the local fresh ingredients as well as their fragrance, thereby maintaining a focus on simplicity rather than sophistication. Southern Italian food is considered to be the **“soul food of Italy.”**

The cuisine is more spicy and reliant on the sun-kissed vegetables available year-round, including superb artichokes, **eggplant, zucchini sun-dried pomodori (tomatoes)**.  Bumper crops of dried red chili peppers, garlic, herbs, olives, olive oil and salty capers are also harvested.  Campania is famous for its fruit orchards that produce some of the best lemons and oranges, figs, peaches, and apricots, and also grapes from numerous vineyards.  Almonds and hazelnuts of the highest quality hale from this region.  Pasta is more often dried in this southern part of Italy versus the fresh pasta of the North, although cooks do use fresh pasta as well. Remember that it is in Campania where the tomato was first introduced to Italy and used in its cuisine.

**San Marzano tomatoes’**extensive rich flavor and deep red color result from flourishing in the rich, fertile volcanic soil of Campania.  Additionally, the ideal growing climate exists in Southern Italy that includes plenty of sunshine with wonderful warm days and cooler evenings.

Seafood and sea-salt are stand-out ingredients in the kitchen.  The sea is a highlight of the food from which it generously offers an endless array of pristine seafood harvested from anchovies to clams, mussels, squid, and even octopus!  Traditionally there is a shorter supply of meat in this region, so it goes without saying that less meat is consumed that has greater reliance on lamb and seafood.

Naples is the original home of authentic pizza!  The world’s first pizzeria opened its doors in Naples and remains in business today.  Using the simplest of ingredients, **Pizza Margherita** is a triumph of **Neapolitan cuisine**!  It has become more popular now in the United States, the ingredients of fresh **San Marzano** **pomodori** (tomatoes), fresh aromatic basilico and **mozzarella (di bufala)**on char-marked dough is all that is required to make this highly-praised and delicious pizza.  The colors of red, white, and green represent the official colors of the Italian flag.  Fresh and bubbly-hot straight out of ancient wood-fired ovens, this is Tomato Pizza as it was meant to be!

***Some the best known foods of Naples are:***

***Spaghetti all Puttanesca***

literally means ‘**whore’s spaghetti’**in Italian!   This is a hot, spicy, tangy, salty and very fragrant pasta dish made from typical local ingredients:  fresh tomatoes, olives, chili peppers, garlic, and capers, all sauteed in olive oil and presented with a sprinkling of fresh Italian parsley.
 ***Parmigiana di Melanzane (Eggplant Parmesan) This*** is an Italian classic dish. There is disagreement among several regions in Italy as to its origin.  As with all traditional recipes, there are numerous claims to the definitive method of preparation.  Because Campania is so renowned for its fresh eggplant that is available throughout the year, I’m going to agree with the Neapolitan saying: “***A parmigiana e’ mulignane ca se fa a’ Napule è semp’a meglio!”***(The eggplant Parmesan that is made in Naples is always the best!).  The authentic method for creating this dish includes all of the region’s noted flavors with layers of eggplant with Provola and Parmigiana cheeses, San Marzano tomatoes, olive oil, onions, garlic and fresh basil!
 ***Bistecca or Carne alla Pizzaiola (Meat in Pizza Style)*** One of the favorite everyday Neapolitan dishes, Pizzaiola is made from inexpensive cuts of meat that are seared and then cooked long enough to be tenderized in a spicy tomato-based sauce of peppers, capers, garlic, basil, oregano, and olive oil.  As with all Italian recipes, numerous versions abound!  Some cooks might add olives or anchovies and even some wine for a lustier flavor and fragrance!  Many Italian cooks always prepare a ***‘soffritto’*** for this and other recipes which is a simple combination of sautéed onions, celery and carrots . . . we also add garlic.

***i dolci (the sweets)*** Neapolitans certainly are known for their preference for sweets!  The desserts of this region focus on citrus and pastry and here are just a few of the region’s favorites:
 ***Sfogliatelle,*** one of the most popular Italian pastries in America are paper-thin layers of beautifully baked clam-shaped pastry pockets filled with a buttery filling of creamy ricotta cheese, sugar, cinnamon, and little bits of candied citrus.  Along with a generous sprinkling of powdered sugar on top, Sfogliatelle comprise a regional dessert specialty These sweet pastries are a Neapolitan treat not to be missed and enjoyed while sipping a good cup of caffe Napolitana!

This is just a sampling of the regional foods of Campania. I am sure we all love these Nalpolitana signature foods.

**Enjoy! Enjoy! Enjoy!**

**Researched and adapted by Salvatore J. Mangano, PNP**