

ANCHOVIES

Anchovies are one of those things that cause strong feelings in people—you either love them or hate them. I happen to be a member of the pro-anchovy school—OK, bad pun. But did you know that anchovies are used all the time in Mediterranean cooking to add not only salt, but a certain intensity of flavor that the Japanese call *umami*—a sort of richness to the taste. There are anchovies in Worcestershire sauce, Caesar salad, and Green Goddess dressing. But just what is an anchovy?

Anchovies are small, shiny silver saltwater fish, about 3 to 5 inches long, which run in large schools and are related to the herring. True anchovies are found in the Mediterranean and southern European coastlines, and are regularly caught off the coasts of Sicily, Italy, France and Spain. While fresh anchovies are eaten in Europe, over here what you get are anchovies either preserved in oil or in salt, or in a tube as anchovy paste. Anchovy paste is less fishy than the canned anchovies, but it's saltier, so be warned. Half a teaspoon of anchovy paste equals about a single anchovy fillet. Rinse anchovies before using them, and the salted ones should be soaked in water or milk for about half an hour before using.

Not just a garnish for pizza, anchovies are used in all kinds of sauces where they simply cook away, leaving a delicious flavor that you'd never guess was the result of an anchovy. Of course, some recipes just feature the anchovy. One of my favorite anchovy recipes is *bagna cauda*, a delicious vegetable dip. Open two 2-ounce cans of anchovies, and drain off the oil. Put the anchovies in a small bowl of water and let them soak while you prepare the vegetables. Trim and prepare a mixture of raw vegetables, such as red, green and yellow sweet peppers, cauliflower, broccoli, carrots, celery sticks, green onions and cucumber sticks. Then, rinse and pat the anchovies dry. Peel and thinly slice 4 to 5 cloves of garlic. Melt a stick of unsalted butter in a frying pan over medium-low heat and add the garlic slices, sautéing gently for a couple of minutes, being careful that they don't brown. Mash up the chopped anchovies with a fork and add to the butter and garlic. Cook for about 10 minutes, stirring constantly. Then put the hot anchovies and butter into a bowl, place the bowl in the middle of a large platter and surround with the vegetables. Serve as an *hors d'oeuvre* or an appetizer.

And anchovies are an essential ingredient of one of my favorite spaghetti dishes—which is popular even with those who claim to hate anchovies. A dish from the poorer districts of Rome, it's called *Prostitute's Spaghetti*, because it could quickly be prepared in the time available to the ladies between clients. Or so they say. And that's all I'm going to say about that—but here's how you make it.

Put a large kettle of water on to boil for the spaghetti. While the water is heating, in a large skillet, heat 4 tablespoons of butter and 3 tablespoons of olive oil over medium heat. When the butter has melted, add 8 anchovy fillets, rinsed and chopped, 3 garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped, and a couple of good pinches of dried red pepper flakes—or more if you like things hotter—and cook for a few minutes, stirring frequently, until the anchovies sort of dissolve in the butter and oil. Add three large ripe tomatoes, cored, seeded and thinly sliced, along with about half a cup of pitted Kalamata olives, sliced in half, and a tablespoon of drained capers. Cook the sauce for three or four minutes and then turn off the heat while you cook a pound of spaghetti.

When the spaghetti is cooked to your liking, drain it and add the spaghetti to the sauce in the skillet. Turn the heat back on and cook for a minute or so, mixing well to blend the flavors. Add about a tablespoon of chopped Italian flat-leaf parsley, cook for another 30 seconds or so, and serve immediately. You don't want any grated Parmesan or Romano cheese with this recipe—grated cheese doesn't work well with seafood pasta sauces. This serves four, or three generously with a loaf of crusty bread, and salad of mixed greens, and a bottle of good Amador Zinfandel.

So I'll take my half of the pizza WITH anchovies please. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.