SOFIA MUTTI

# AT SOFIA'S TABLE

Italian Family Cooking from What You Already Have



**100 recipes | Smart swaps | Family meal plans**

Start with an ingredient. Bring everyone to the table.

WELCOME TO THE TABLE

# Start with what you have.

*A pack of chicken, a bag of potatoes, a few eggs or yesterday's pasta: an ordinary ingredient is enough to begin planning a good family meal.*

## Open the fridge, then open the book

This book is arranged around ingredients. Choose the chapter that matches what you already have, then pick a recipe that fits tonight. Some dishes use only a few pantry additions. Others are for a slower Sunday or a fuller table. There are 100 illustrated recipes, including mains, substantial vegetable dishes, sides, snacks and one bread pudding.

## An Italian family approach

Vegetables, pulses, bread, eggs and pasta have a central place here. Meat can be part of a meal without taking up the whole plate. Simple methods, careful seasoning and a sensible use of ingredients connect the recipes. The point is to make the food you own useful and enjoyable.

## Four people, with room for six

Most main recipes serve four. Sides and smaller preparations are clearly identified, with suggestions for completing the meal. Each scaling note explains how to cook for six or increase the stated batch. A four-portion dinner does not automatically leave another dinner for four, so extra portions must be planned.

## What to look for while cooking

The useful detail may be the way a meatball mixture holds together, the moisture left in squeezed spinach or the space between potato pieces. Each recipe explains what to notice, what to change and what to do with a safely stored extra portion.

Italian family cooking from what you already have.

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*Tap a chapter or use the PDF bookmarks. Each recipe includes a printable card.*

FIND TONIGHT'S DINNER

# What is in your kitchen?

*Use these starting points when you know the ingredient or the situation, but have not yet chosen the meal.*

## A pack of chicken or ground meat

For chicken, start with recipes 01-10. For ground meat and sausages, turn to recipes 11-20. Try the soft meatballs in recipe 16 when you want a clear mixture-and-texture lesson. Use recipes 09-10 only with cooked chicken that has been stored safely.

## Potatoes, eggs or a half-full fridge

Potatoes begin at recipe 21, and eggs and ricotta at recipe 31. A small vegetable side needs a substantial partner, so read the declared yield and serving suggestion. Recipe 100 is a measured frittata for suitable cooked vegetables, with a clear leftover-age limit.

## A pantry evening or a cold night

Tomatoes begin at recipe 41, pulses at recipe 61, winter vegetables at recipe 71, and rice and pasta at recipe 81. Pasta e Ceci, recipe 64, and Barley Soup, recipe 72, are practical places to start for a pot of something warm.

## Yesterday's dinner, used deliberately

Bread and leftover recipes begin at 91. Find bread polpette at 96, spaghetti frittata at 97, crisp pasta at 98 and a rice bake at 99. Sound stale bread is useful, but mouldy bread must be discarded. Cooked rice has a shorter storage limit than most other leftovers.

Feeding six? Read the scaling box on the method page. Planning the week? The four menus begin on page 419.

FOUNDATIONS / 03

# Cook safely. Check the centre.

*Colour is useful for flavour and texture, but it does not establish that a food has reached a safe internal temperature. Use a thermometer.*

## Keep raw and ready-to-eat food apart

Wash hands with soap before cooking and after handling raw animal foods. Keep raw meat and fish covered on a low fridge shelf, below cooked food and salad ingredients. Do not put cooked food back on an unwashed plate that held it raw. Wash fruit and vegetables under running water.

## Minimum internal temperatures

Poultry and stuffed meat: 74 C / 165 F. Ground beef and pork: 71 C / 160 F. Whole beef, pork and lamb cuts: 63 C / 145 F, followed by a 3-minute rest. Finfish: 63 C / 145 F. Egg dishes: 71 C / 160 F. Hot reheated leftovers: 74 C / 165 F throughout. These safety checks are separate from any higher temperature needed for a tender braise.

## Eggs, shellfish and vulnerable guests

Follow the recipe's cooked-custard or pasteurised-egg directions for desserts. For live mussels and clams, buy from a reputable seller, keep cold and follow their label. Discard cracked shells and live shellfish that do not close when tapped. Cook as directed and discard shells that remain closed. People at higher risk from foodborne illness should avoid raw or undercooked animal foods.

## Cold holding and time out

Keep the fridge at 4 C / 40 F or below. Refrigerate perishables within 2 hours, or within 1 hour when the room is above 32 C / 90 F. Include time spent serving. Food that has been kept unsafely is not made reliably safe by reheating it. Do not taste it to decide.

These temperatures follow US food-safety guidance. Use the stricter rule if local advice or an ingredient label requires it.

FOUNDATIONS / 04

# Give leftovers a clear plan.

*Keep the portion you will use, cool it promptly and label it. The book uses a conservative household limit of 48 hours for most cooked meals.*

## Cool in small portions

Divide hot food into shallow containers so heat can escape quickly. Do not leave a large pot on the counter until it is completely cold. Refrigerate within 2 hours of cooking, sooner when practical. Keep containers loosely covered during rapid cooling, protected from contamination, then close them when cold. Keep the fridge at 4 C / 40 F or below.

## Rice needs a shorter routine

Cool cooked rice as quickly as possible, ideally within 1 hour, in a shallow container. Refrigerate and use within 24 hours. Reheat only once, until 74 C / 165 F throughout, and serve immediately. Do not leave rice in a warm pot for hours. Freeze a portion promptly after rapid cooling if it is not for tomorrow.

## Reheat only the portion you need

Heat suitable leftovers to 74 C / 165 F throughout. Stir soups and sauces, turn solid pieces and check more than one point, especially after microwaving. Reheat a portion only once. Turning a leftover into a new dish does not restart its storage clock. Follow any shorter recipe or package limit.

## Freeze with a label

Write the dish name, cooking date, portion count and a planned use date on the container. The recipe gives a suggested freezer quality period where appropriate. Keep the freezer at -18 C / 0 F. Thaw in the fridge and use within 24 hours after fully thawed, unless a shorter limit applies. Never thaw meat or cooked meals on the counter.

The 48-hour meal policy is deliberately cautious. Some plain breads and dry biscuits have different storage instructions in their recipes.

MINCE AND SAUSAGES

# Soft Meatballs in Tomato Sauce

*Gentle simmering lets soft meatballs finish directly in their tomato sauce. Bread and milk lighten the beef mixture, and sixteen small portions make serving straightforward when everyone arrives at the table with a different appetite.*



**START WITH**
500 g / 1 lb 2 oz ground beef

**MAKES**
4 family main portions

**PREP / COOK**
25 minutes / 30-40 minutes

**WAIT / REST**
5 minutes for bread to soften

**EQUIPMENT**
Wide lidded skillet, mixing bowl, thermometer

## WHAT YOU NEED

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) ground beef
60 g (2 oz) soft bread, torn
80 ml (1/3 cup) milk
1 large egg
30 g (1 oz) grated Parmesan
100 g (3 1/2 oz) onion, finely chopped
700 g (1 lb 9 oz) crushed tomatoes
2 tbsp (30 ml) olive oil
100 ml (scant 1/2 cup) water
1/2 tsp fine salt, divided, and black pepper
8 basil leaves

*Good for: Soft meatballs for a family sauce*

MINCE AND SAUSAGES

# Soft Meatballs in Tomato Sauce

**01** Soak torn bread in milk for 5 minutes, then mash until no large dry pieces remain. Add beef, egg, Parmesan, half the salt and a little pepper. Mix gently just until evenly combined, without kneading the meat into a firm paste.

**02** Divide into sixteen portions and roll with lightly damp hands. Keep the shaped meatballs chilled while making the sauce. Wash hands and utensils that touched raw beef before handling tomatoes, basil or the clean serving dishes.

**03** Warm oil in a wide lidded skillet over medium-low heat. Soften onion for 5-7 minutes, then add tomatoes, water and remaining salt. Simmer uncovered for 8-10 minutes until the sauce begins to thicken slightly.

**04** Lower the meatballs into the simmering sauce in one layer. Partly cover and cook gently for 15-20 minutes, turning carefully halfway. Avoid a rolling boil that can break the soft mixture before its surface sets.

**05** Probe the largest meatballs and several others, continuing until their centers reach 71C/160F. Tear in basil and spoon sauce over the tops. Serve four meatballs per person, keeping any planned leftover portion separate before bringing the pan to the table.

### THE DETAIL THAT MATTERS

Let the sauce simmer gently around the meatballs. Strong boiling can knock the soft mixture apart before it sets, while a quiet simmer cooks the centers and lets the tomato sauce take on flavor from the beef.

### A BIGGER TABLE

For six, use 750 g beef and 1.5 times the other ingredients. Beat two eggs and weigh 75 g. Make twenty-four meatballs in a broad casserole or two pans.

MINCE AND SAUSAGES

# Soft Meatballs in Tomato Sauce

### Shop your kitchen first

Start with ground beef and soft bread that needs using, checking that the bread is sound and free of mold. Milk, an egg and canned tomatoes do most of the remaining work. Basil is a finishing ingredient, so use only what is available.

### A useful swap

Replace the 60 g soft bread with 40 g fine breadcrumbs and keep the 80 ml milk. Soak for 5 minutes before mixing. If basil is unavailable, add 1 tsp dried oregano to the tomato sauce during its first simmer.

### Keep it safely

Cool in shallow containers and refrigerate at 4C/40F or below within 2 hours, or 1 hour above 32C/90F. Eat within 48 hours. Freeze promptly for 2 months if needed and thaw in the refrigerator. Reheat one portion once with a splash of water until it reaches 74C/165F throughout.

### Give it another job

Cut leftover meatballs in half and reheat once in their sauce to 74C/165F. Spoon into a baked potato or over cooked pasta for another meal. Use within the original storage period and keep the second serving separate until needed.

IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG

| | |
|---|---|
| **Meatballs break apart** | Keep the sauce at a gentle simmer and avoid moving the balls during their first few minutes. Turn carefully once their surfaces have set. |
| **Mixture feels heavy** | Mash the soaked bread fully and mix the beef only until combined. Overworking the mixture makes the cooked meatballs compact rather than soft. |
| **Sauce reduces before centers cook** | Add a small splash of water and partly cover the pan. Continue gently until the largest meatball centers reach 71C/160F. |

*At the table: Serve four meatballs per person with polenta, potatoes or bread and a vegetable side to complete the family meal.*

Allergen pointers: wheat, milk, egg. Always check labels and cross-contact.

MINCE AND SAUSAGES

# Soft Meatballs in Tomato Sauce

4 family main portions | Prep 25 minutes | Cook 30-40 minutes | Wait 5 minutes for bread to soften

## INGREDIENTS

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) ground beef

60 g (2 oz) soft bread, torn

80 ml (1/3 cup) milk

1 large egg

30 g (1 oz) grated Parmesan

100 g (3 1/2 oz) onion, finely chopped

700 g (1 lb 9 oz) crushed tomatoes

2 tbsp (30 ml) olive oil

100 ml (scant 1/2 cup) water

1/2 tsp fine salt, divided, and black pepper

8 basil leaves

## QUICK METHOD

1. Soak bread in milk for 5 minutes and mash. Gently mix with beef, egg, Parmesan, half the salt and pepper. Shape sixteen meatballs.
2. Soften onion in oil for 5-7 minutes. Add tomatoes, water and remaining salt, then simmer for 8-10 minutes.
3. Add meatballs in one layer. Partly cover and simmer gently for 15-20 minutes, turning carefully halfway, until centers reach 71C/160F.
4. Tear in basil and spoon sauce over the meatballs. Serve four per person with a substantial starchy side and vegetables.

## CHECK BEFORE SERVING

Let the sauce simmer gently around the meatballs. Strong boiling can knock the soft mixture apart before it sets, while a quiet simmer cooks the centers and lets the tomato sauce take on flavor from the beef.

## COOL, KEEP & REHEAT

Cool in shallow containers and refrigerate at 4C/40F or below within 2 hours, or 1 hour above 32C/90F. Eat within 48 hours. Freeze promptly for 2 months if needed and thaw in the refrigerator. Reheat one portion once with a splash of water until it reaches 74C/165F throughout.

*Read the full method on page 80. Allergen pointers: wheat, milk, egg*

BREAD AND YESTERDAY'S DINNER

# Stale Bread Polpette in Tomato Sauce

*Stale bread can become soft savory polpette rather than another bag of crumbs. Eggs and cheese hold the mixture together, while a simple tomato sauce turns sixteen small balls into a family meal.*



**START WITH**

250 g / 9 oz stale country bread

**MAKES**

16 polpette, serving 4 as a main with vegetables

**PREP / COOK**

25 minutes / 30-40 minutes

**WAIT / REST**

10 minutes soaking and 5 minutes settling

**EQUIPMENT**

Mixing bowl, baking tray and wide lidded skillet

## WHAT YOU NEED

250 g (9 oz) stale country bread, torn small

200 ml (3/4 cup plus 1 tbsp) milk

2 large eggs

60 g (2 oz) finely grated Parmesan

2 tbsp chopped parsley

20 g (3 tbsp) dry breadcrumbs, only if needed

700 g (about 3 cups) tomato passata

1 medium onion, about 140 g/5 oz, finely chopped

30 ml (2 tbsp) olive oil, divided

150 ml (1/2 cup plus 2 tbsp) water

8 basil leaves

1/2 tsp fine salt, adjusted to cheese, and black pepper

*Good for: Use the last of the loaf*

BREAD AND YESTERDAY'S DINNER

# Stale Bread Polpette in Tomato Sauce

**01** Heat the oven to 210 C/410 F. Put the torn bread in a bowl and pour over the milk. Leave for 10 minutes, turning and pressing occasionally until the crumb softens. Remove any exceptionally hard crust pieces that remain rigid rather than forcing them into the mixture.

**02** Mash the softened bread with a fork. Mix in eggs, Parmesan, parsley, pepper, and a little salt. Let stand for 5 minutes, then squeeze a small portion together. Add dry breadcrumbs only if necessary, a spoonful at a time, until the mixture holds its shape.

**03** With damp hands form 16 balls about 4-4.5 cm/1 1/2-1 3/4 in across. Brush a tray with 10 ml oil and arrange apart. Bake for 12-15 minutes, turning once, until their surfaces set and lightly color so they can move into sauce without breaking.

**04** Meanwhile soften the onion in remaining oil in a wide skillet over medium-low heat for 6-8 minutes. Add passata and water, bring to a gentle simmer, and cook for 8 minutes. Taste the sauce before adding more salt because the polpette contain cheese.

**05** Nestle the baked balls into the sauce, cover partly, and simmer gently for 10-12 minutes, turning once carefully. Check the egg-bound center reaches 71 C/160 F. Tear in basil and serve four polpette per person with vegetables, spooning sauce over each portion.

### THE DETAIL THAT MATTERS

The first oven stage gives the bread mixture a skin before it enters the sauce. Moving completely soft balls straight into a bubbling pan can break them apart. After adding them, maintain a gentle simmer and turn only once with a broad spoon.

### A BIGGER TABLE

For six, use 375 g bread, 300 ml milk, 3 eggs, and 90 g cheese to make 24 balls. Increase sauce by half and use two trays.

BREAD AND YESTERDAY'S DINNER

# Stale Bread Polpette in Tomato Sauce

### Shop your kitchen first

Start with stale bread that is dry but free from mold, then check for eggs, milk, and a hard-cheese end. Different loaves absorb differently, so keep the optional dry crumbs nearby. Passata and one onion make enough sauce without buying a prepared pasta sauce.

### A useful swap

Replace milk with 200 ml water for soaking, and use 60 g grated mature cheddar instead of Parmesan if necessary. Replace parsley with 1 teaspoon dried mixed herbs. A dense whole-grain loaf may need 2-4 tablespoons extra soaking water before the egg is added.

### Keep it safely

Cool polpette and sauce in shallow containers within two hours, or one hour above 32 C/90 F. Refrigerate at 4 C/40 F or below for up to 48 hours. Freeze for one month. Thaw refrigerated and reheat one portion once in a covered pan with water until the center reaches 74 C/165 F.

### Give it another job

Within the original 48-hour window, break two remaining polpette into their sauce and warm once to 74 C/165 F with a handful of cooked beans. Serve over fresh greens or soft polenta, keeping the original deadline rather than treating the new meal as newly made.

IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG

| | |
|---|---|
| **Mixture will not hold a ball** | Allow the soaked bread and egg mixture to stand before judging. Add dry crumbs gradually only if needed, rather than making the mixture stiff immediately. |
| **Polpette break in the sauce** | Bake until their surfaces have set, then lower them gently into simmering sauce. Avoid a rolling boil and turn only once with a broad spoon. |
| **Centers feel hard or dry** | Soften the bread completely before mixing and use optional crumbs sparingly. Keep enough sauce around the balls during the final gentle simmer. |

*At the table: Serve four polpette per person with their tomato sauce and cooked greens, using the bread in the balls as the starchy portion.*

Allergen pointers: Wheat, Milk, Egg. Always check labels and cross-contact.

BREAD AND YESTERDAY'S DINNER

# Stale Bread Polpette in Tomato Sauce

16 polpette, serving 4 as a main with vegetables | Prep 25 minutes | Cook 30-40 minutes | Wait 10 minutes soaking and 5 minutes settling

## INGREDIENTS

250 g (9 oz) stale country bread, torn small

200 ml (3/4 cup plus 1 tbsp) milk

2 large eggs

60 g (2 oz) finely grated Parmesan

2 tbsp chopped parsley

20 g (3 tbsp) dry breadcrumbs, only if needed

700 g (about 3 cups) tomato passata

1 medium onion, about 140 g/5 oz, finely chopped

30 ml (2 tbsp) olive oil, divided

150 ml (1/2 cup plus 2 tbsp) water

8 basil leaves

1/2 tsp fine salt, adjusted to cheese, and black pepper

## QUICK METHOD

1. Heat oven to 210 C/410 F. Soak torn bread in milk 10 minutes, mash, then mix with eggs, cheese, parsley and seasonings.
2. Rest 5 minutes and add optional crumbs only if needed. Shape 16 balls, place on a lightly oiled tray, and bake 12-15 minutes, turning once.
3. Soften onion in remaining oil 6-8 minutes. Add passata and water, then simmer 8 minutes before adding the balls.
4. Simmer gently 10-12 minutes to 71 C/160 F in the centers. Add basil and serve with vegetables.

## CHECK BEFORE SERVING

The first oven stage gives the bread mixture a skin before it enters the sauce. Moving completely soft balls straight into a bubbling pan can break them apart. After adding them, maintain a gentle simmer and turn only once with a broad spoon.

## COOL, KEEP & REHEAT

Cool polpette and sauce in shallow containers within two hours, or one hour above 32 C/90 F. Refrigerate at 4 C/40 F or below for up to 48 hours. Freeze for one month. Thaw refrigerated and reheat one portion once in a covered pan with water until the center reaches 74 C/165 F.

*Read the full method on page 400. Allergen pointers: Wheat, Milk, Egg*

WEEK 1 / FOUR PEOPLE

# One basket, several dinners

*A shared basket of ricotta, vegetables, tomatoes and pulses supports seven varied meals for four.*


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Monday** | Spaghetti with Lemon Ricotta | **155** |
| **Tuesday** | Chicken and Peppers in a Skillet | **19** |
| **Wednesday** | White Bean and Cabbage Skillet | **259** |
| **Thursday** | Potato and Onion Frittata | **135** |
| **Friday** | One-Pot Pasta e Ceci | **271** |
| **Saturday** | Soft Meatballs in Tomato Sauce | **79** |
| **Sunday** | Baked Eggplant with Ricotta and Tomato | **203** |


Read the two shopping pages and the preparation plan together. Main recipe quantities follow their declared yields. Side additions are listed separately. Check what you already own before buying, and combine repeated ingredients across the list.

WEEK 1 / USE IT WELL

# A plan for the ingredients.

*Keep the week flexible. Follow the ingredient labels, cool cooked food promptly and freeze portions intended for later.*

## Before the shop

Check which ricotta dishes share the same pack size. Buy separate sealed packs for Monday and Sunday if one opened pack would exceed its label limit. Freeze any meat that will not be cooked within its use-by period, then allow time to thaw in the fridge.

## Early in the week

Make lemon-ricotta pasta Monday. Cook Tuesday's extra rice by its packet directions alongside the chicken. Make the bean-cabbage skillet Wednesday. Freeze half the bread in useful portions on purchase. Keep unused raw cabbage chilled for another recipe while still in good condition.

## The second half

Cook the frittata Thursday and Pasta e Ceci Friday. Boil the extra potatoes in even pieces until tender for Saturday's meatballs. Divide the salad vegetables across Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Read Sunday's eggplant method before starting so its ingredients can drain as directed.

## What to keep

These quantities provide the seven stated dinners, not seven extra lunches. Cook additional portions only if you plan to use or freeze them. Refrigerated cooked meals follow the 48-hour rule, and all portions retain their original cooking date.

For ordinary cooked meals, use within 48 hours. For rice, cool quickly and use within 24 hours. Reheat a portion only once to 74 C / 165 F. A new dish does not restart the clock.

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# Find a recipe.

*Page numbers lead to the ingredients and photo. The next three pages hold the method, practical notes and quick card.*

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