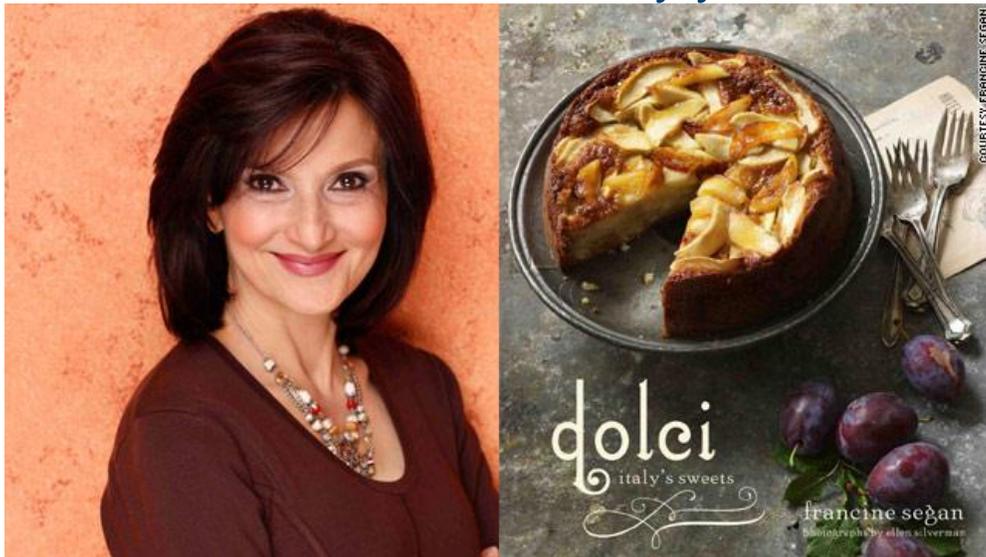




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5@5 - Five sweet treats from Italy you need to know



5@5 is a daily, food-related list from chefs, writers, political pundits, musicians, actors, and all manner of opinionated people from around the globe.

Francine Segan spent a year in Italy eating desserts for her new cookbook *Dolci: Italy's Sweets*. Tough gig, we know. Sure, she found the usual beloved suspects - tiramisu, panna cotta, affogato, cannoli - but she also discovered a sampler platter of regional specialties that have been popular in Italy for decades, centuries even, that we've hardly ever heard of on this side of the Atlantic.

Here's to *la dolce vita*.

Five Sweet Treats from Italy You Need To Know: Francine Segan

1. *Pasta for dessert*

"Yes, you read that right. Pasta is also for dessert in Italy. Has been since the Renaissance when pasta was a luxury food served topped with sugar, grated nutmeg and Parmesan cheese.

There are dozens of fabulous Italian desserts made with pasta. I discovered a crunchy-chewy chocolate pasta pie popular in Bologna; in Sicily, there's a simple dessert made with twirled forkfuls of leftover angel hair pasta, quickly fried, then topped with honey and chopped pistachios. A Christmas Eve specialty in central Italy is macaroni with chocolate walnut sauce and in the Veneto, they enjoy a sweet lasagna layered with sliced apples and dried fruit as a holiday dessert. There are also dozens of dessert ravioli that are baked and filled with everything from chickpeas sweetened with jam and chocolate to sweet ricotta fillings.

For a quick and satisfying pasta dessert, toss cooked hot linguine with grated milk or dark chocolate. Serve it in a wine glass topped with a splash of hazelnut liqueur, a sprinkle of crushed hazelnuts, and a dollop of mascarpone cheese or whipped cream."

Sicilian Pasta Crisps

Pasta Fritta alla Siciliana

Serves 6

Ingredients

- 1/3 pound angel hair or vermicelli pasta
- 1/4 cup honey
- 2 tablespoons finely minced candied orange peel
- sunflower or other vegetable oil
- pistachios, very finely crushed
- ground cinnamon

Cooking Directions

1. Cook the pasta in salted water according to the package directions. Drain. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, combine the honey and candied orange peel.
2. Put about 1/4 inch of oil in a small frying pan and heat until hot, but not smoking. Twirl small forkfuls of the pasta, drop them into the hot oil, and cook until golden and crisp at the edges. Turn, and cook on the other side for just a few seconds. Drain the pasta crisps on a plate lined with paper towels. Arrange the pasta crisps on serving plate. Serve warm, drizzled with the honey mixture and topped with a sprinkle of pistachios and cinnamon.

2. Red wine desserts

"Italy has wonderful red wines such as Chianti and Barolo that are used in desserts for added flavor and moisture. There are many recipes for fruit simmered in red wine, as well as chocolate cakes and pies.

One of my favorites is a red wine ring cookies that are not only made with red wine, but traditionally served with a glass of red too. Italians pull them out after dinner to nibble on with the meal's left-over wine. To make red wine cookies, *tarallucci al vino*, combine about 4 cups of flour with 1/2 cup dry red wine, 1/2 cup sugar, 1/3 cup olive oil, one egg and a pinch of salt. Knead until smooth and then roll out strips about 1/2 inch wide and 3 inches long. Form little rings, dip in sugar, then bake, sugar side up in a 350° oven for about 15 minutes, until dry to the touch. Once cool, they keep for three months. Great for dunking in a glass of red wine!"

3. "Refrigerator" cake

"Refrigerator cakes are my absolute favorite category of Italian sweets - meaning, desserts that are not only kept in the fridge but also need a time in the fridge to fully develop. Many of them are no-bake and use store-bought ingredients like *savoardi*, or lady fingers. A huge plus for me is the fact that these cakes keep fresh for days and improve with time, so they are great make-ahead treats.

My favorite refrigerator cake, *torta mimosa*, is a popular dessert for Italian women, which is eaten on March in celebration of International Women's Day - Festa della Donna - a sort of BFF day celebrating womanhood and female friendships. The cake looks like a bouquet of mimosa flowers."

4. Fruit for dessert

"In warm weather Italians often end a meal with fresh fruit floating in bowl of ice water. But in the winter they dress it up and make winter fruit salad, *macedonia invernale*. A terrific no-cook, no-fuss dessert. Mix a handful or two of your favorite dried fruits with nuts, chopped chocolate and any candy you have on hand. Add some orange juice and a splash of liqueur and pass the spoons. It's a little like a deconstructed fruit cake - only scrumptious and striking - especially if you include colorful dried fruit like strawberries, cherries and apricots."

5. Pandoro

"Pandoro, a tall star-shaped cake, has a delicious, eggy, brioche-like soft center with a lovely vanilla-butter aroma. You can find it at holiday time in most supermarkets. It comes in a hat-box like container, readymade. I recommend [Bauli's pandoro](#), which thanks to the natural yeast used in making pandoro, it lasts more than six months without refrigeration. You can use it any recipe that calls for sponge cake like zuppa inglese.

In Italy, pandoro is often served cut in horizontal slices that are stacked to look like a Christmas tree. Each layer is spread with mascarpone custard and decorated with candies to create a pandoro Christmas tree cake. It even comes boxed with a packet of confectioners sugar to sprinkle on top.

You can spread the pandoro with anything creamy like ice cream, whipped cream, icing, pastry cream or even zabaglione. And just like a gingerbread house, you can decorate it with anything festive including tiny candies, sprinkles or crushed candy canes."

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