

Butternut Squash Gnocchi in Sage Butter Sauce

Gnocchi di Zucca con Salvia e Burro

These pale orange gnocchi make a perfect first course to a holiday meal. The gnocchi can be formed ahead of time. Dust them with flour and freeze them, in one layer, on a well-floured baking sheet. Once they're frozen solid, they can be frozen in a plastic freezer bag until ready to use. When boiling frozen gnocchi, make sure you use lots of water so it will come back to boil quickly; otherwise the gnocchi may clump together.

Yield: Serves 6 to 8 as a first course, 4 to 6 as a main course

Ingredients for gnocchi:

1 pound chunk butternut squash (about half a medium squash)

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

2 medium russet potatoes (about 12 ounces)

¼ cup freshly grated Grana Padano

1 large egg

1 teaspoon kosher salt

¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

1 ½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more as needed

Ingredients for Sage Butter Sauce:

1 stick unsalted butter

12 fresh sage leaves

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

½ cup grated Grana Padano, plus more for serving

Recipe:

For the gnocchi, preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Scoop seeds from the squash, and place in a baking pan, cut side up. Drizzle with the olive oil. Bake until tender throughout, about 45 minutes to 1 hour. Let cool.

When it is cool, scrape the flesh from the squash, set in cheesecloth, and let hang or set in a strainer in the refrigerator to drain, about 2 hours. You should have about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 cup squash.

Cook the potatoes in a medium saucepan with water to cover until tender, about 20 to 25 minutes. Drain, let cool until you can peel them, then peel and press through a ricer into an even layer on your work surface.

Let cool completely. You should have about 2 cups potatoes. Pass the drained squash through the ricer as well.

In a large bowl, combine the squash, potatoes, grated cheese, egg, salt, and nutmeg, and mix until smooth. Sprinkle in $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups of the flour, and mix to combine. Dump the dough onto your work surface, and knead until it comes together. If the dough is still sticky, add the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup flour (or more, if your squash was very wet), and knead just until smooth.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Divide dough into eight equal pieces. Line two large rimmed baking sheets with parchment. Sprinkle parchment lightly with flour. Working with one dough piece at a time, roll dough out on a floured surface to about a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick rope. Cut rope crosswise into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch pieces.

Working with one piece at a time, roll gnocchi along the back of fork tines dipped in flour, making ridges on 1 side and a dimple on the other. Transfer the gnocchi to the floured baking sheets. Repeat with the remaining dough.

When you're ready to cook the gnocchi, make the sage butter sauce. Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the sage leaves and cook until they begin to crisp and the butter is just beginning to brown, about 1 minute. Add 1 cup of the pasta water and bring to a boil. Cook until reduced by half, 3 or 4 minutes.

Meanwhile, cook the gnocchi in two batches in the boiling water, giving them just a couple minutes more after they all float to the surface. Remove with a spider and transfer to the sauce. Season with salt and pepper, remembering that the pasta water was salted.

Sprinkle with the grated cheese, toss and serve, passing more cheese at the table.