

Life-perfected Recipes from Grandmothers of the Mediterranean

# MEDITERRANEA



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# Nicoletta's Involtini di Pesce Spada

## Sicilian Swordfish Rolls

Nicoletta might well be the lady of an enormous 17th-century palazzo, standing stately on Palermo's promenade, but that doesn't stop her rubbing shoulders with shouty merchants at the Capo market. 'Unfortunately, a modern Duchess doesn't have time to sit around painting her nails,' she tells me as we browse swordfish amid the morning chaos.

I first met Nicoletta years ago when I briefly moved to Palermo. She runs a Sicilian cooking workshop out of the palace in which Lampedusa once sat to write his seminal Italian novel *The Leopard* and I signed up to glean some culinary knowledge of my new home in a remarkable setting.

These swordfish rolls are a go-to for Nicoletta and encapsulate Sicilian cuisine and its complex history. A vibrant burst of citrus and sweet notes from the currants elevates the swordfish while crunchy breadcrumbs and pine nuts add great textural diversity. I like to serve these with Nonna Cece's *Insalata di Cedro* (page 38), followed by Nonna Carmela's *Tiramisu* (page 231).

SERVES 4

### INGREDIENTS

175 ml (6 fl oz/¾ cup)  
extra virgin olive oil

1 red onion, finely  
diced

200 ml (7 fl oz/scant  
1 cup) water

160 g (5½ oz) very fine  
dried breadcrumbs

3 anchovy fillets

1 bunch each of  
parsley and mint,  
leaves finely chopped

20 g (¾ oz/  
2 tablespoons)  
currants

40 g (1½ oz/  
3 tablespoons)  
pine nuts

zest and juice of  
1 lemon

zest and juice of  
1 orange, plus 1  
orange to serve

1 teaspoon pink  
peppercorns

1 kg (2 lb 4 oz)  
swordfish steak, sliced  
as thinly as possible

15 bay leaves, soaked  
in water for 10 minutes

2 small onions,  
quartered

salt and freshly ground  
black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 170°C fan (375°F).
2. Heat 50 ml (1¾ fl oz/3½ tablespoons) of the oil in a frying pan over a medium heat and fry the red onion for a minute, then add the water and leave to bubble away for about 15 minutes until the onion is soft and just golden.
3. Once the onion has softened, stir in two thirds of the breadcrumbs and cook for 2–3 minutes to toast them.
4. In a separate bowl, mash the anchovies in another 50 ml (1¾ fl oz/3½ tablespoons) of the olive oil with a fork, then add the herbs, currants, pine nuts, lemon and orange zests and juice and pink peppercorns. Add the toasted breadcrumbs along with a decent crack of black pepper and a pinch of salt. This is what you will use to fill your swordfish slices.
5. Place about 1 teaspoon of the filling on a slice of swordfish, near one of the corners. Roll the corner of the slice over the stuffing, folding and tucking in the edges to keep the same width as you roll the swordfish around the filling, creating a small package. Repeat the process until all the swordfish slices have been used.
6. Thread the swordfish rolls onto wooden skewers, placing a bay leaf and slice of onion between each one. You should manage to fit four rolls per skewer, depending on the length of the skewers you have.
7. Pour the remaining 75 ml (2½ fl oz/5 tablespoons) of olive oil onto a plate and scatter the remaining breadcrumbs over another plate. Dip the swordfish skewers into the oil, turning them to ensure all the rolls are coated in oil, then dipping them into the breadcrumbs.
8. Place the skewers on a baking tray (pan), sprinkle with a final helping of salt and any breadcrumbs that are left on the plate and bake in the oven for 20 minutes, turning the skewers halfway through, until the involtini take on a deep, golden tone.
9. Slice the orange and serve the skewers on top.





*'I'm not originally from Sicily and neither was I born into nobility. The Italian aristocracy now is just a title. I didn't marry my husband, Gioacchino, because of a title or because of his palazzo, I married him for the person that he was. There was nearly a 20-year age gap between us but he really was a 'young' person and I loved that. We did a lot together. We moved all over the world because he travelled for his job. He worked as a director of cultural institutes and for a period we lived in New York together where we hosted many dinner parties.*

*I suppose the art of hosting, including cooking and setting the table, was inherited from my own mother. My parents held a lot of parties when I was a child, and I would help with the preparations. In my adult life with Gioacchino, I continued to play the hostess and, naturally, when we moved to Palermo, the cooking classes began. An American friend of mine insisted on my hosting these in the palazzo after coming to Capo market in the old town with me.*

*Sicilian food is incredibly rich and regional. It's heavily influenced by those who passed through here and conquered the island throughout various periods of history. We have the Arabs to thank for our inclusion of pine nuts and raisins in many of our recipes, like these swordfish involtini.'*

NICOLETTA — B. 1952 — VENICE — ITALY







