

How to make homemade Gnocchi

For years I was oblivious to the joys of gnocchi. It was really my daughter Jenna, and her love of gnocchi that sparked my interest. Now it is one of my favorites and we make it a point to have a gnocchi dish on the restaurant menu each season.

Gnocchi (pronounced nee-YOH-key) means *lumps* in Italian and they are essentially tiny dumplings. It is a traditional form of Italian pasta which dates back to the days of the Romans. Typically they are made out of potato, or sometimes out of semolina flour. Another popular variety, common in Tuscany and regions north, is Gnocchi di Spinaci e Ricotta (Spinach and Ricotta Gnocchi), which will be in a future cook book.

Gnocchi are not difficult to make but getting them just right takes a little practice. The best gnocchi are soft, light and fluffy.

Gnocchi Techniques and Tips:

There are really just two keys to making gnocchi with that desired tender, light and fluffy texture.

1. Gnocchi has flour worked into the dough. One key to successful gnocchi is to add just the right amount of flour. Too little will yield a dough that is too sticky and falls apart; and the gnocchi will be overly soft and mushy. Too much flour on the other hand will make the gnocchi dense and chewy. It is hard to tell you an exact amount because the moisture level of the potatoes and the spinach-ricotta blend can vary. So when making the gnocchi, I will instruct you to start with a certain amount of flour and then add a little more as needed.
2. The other tip is to not overwork the dough which will make it tough. This is one reason not to use your mixer or food processor to mix the dough. You want to knead the dough by hand.

Potato Gnocchi Tips:

For successful potato gnocchi there are just a few keys... one is to choose the right type of potato and the other is how you cook, and mash it.

1. The best kind of potatoes for gnocchi are Russet or other baking potatoes. Waxy types should be avoided, as should other types which are higher in moisture content (requiring too much flour).
2. Baking is the best method for cooking the potatoes. Baking causes the potatoes to lose some of their water weight which will then require less flour, yielding greater tenderness to the gnocchi. It will also give you better potato flavor.
3. When mashing you want to avoid lumpy potatoes, both because of an undesirable texture and because it can cause your dough to break apart. The best method is to use a ricer. They are inexpensive and you will also love using it when you make mashed potatoes.

Potato Gnocchi

A number of delightful recipes in which to use these gnocchi appear on the following pages. You can always purchase store bought potato gnocchi but they are not quite as good, and its fun to make your own. This is an easy recipe to double for a crowd, or if you'd like to freeze some for future use. Buon appetito!

Serves 4 as a main course
or 6 as a first course

2 pounds Russet potatoes-- washed

1-1/4 cups all purpose flour--plus
more as needed

1 teaspoon salt



1. Read Techniques and Tips on previous page.
2. Heat oven to 400 F. Bake the potatoes until fork tender, about 50 to 60 minutes.
3. While the potatoes are still hot, hold with a fork inserted and peel away the skin with a paring knife (the skin will re-adhere as the potato cools).
4. Rice the potatoes into a large mixing bowl and allow to cool 15 minutes.
5. Sprinkle the 1-1/4 cups flour and the salt over the potatoes. Using clean hands, work the dough until evenly mixed and the dough has a smooth consistency. If the dough feels excessively sticky, add one or two tablespoons of additional flour.
6. Flour your work surface. Also lightly flour a baking sheet (or a Silpat liner), on which to place the individual gnocchi after they are formed.
7. Divide the dough in quarters. Flour your hands, and then roll one piece of dough on the floured surface into a rope, about 5/8 inch thick.
8. Using a pastry cutter or a knife, cut each rope into 3/4 inch lengths.
9. Flour your fork or other ridge-making tool (if using a fork, hold it nearly vertical with the outer curve of the tines away from you--see photo). Press each piece of dough against the ridged surface with your index finger to make an indentation in the middle. Roll the dough down and off the ridges and let it fall to the work surface. Periodically transfer to baking sheet.
10. If you desire to freeze some or all of the gnocchi for future use, place the baking sheet in the freezer. Once gnocchi are frozen, transfer to a zip-loc freezer storage bag. Gnocchi can be cooked frozen.
11. For cooking, bring water to boil and add a tablespoon of salt. Working in batches, add gnocchi to water and cook until they rise to the surface. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain.