

# Simplicity secret to Italian-style speducci

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**K**nown as arrosticini, spiedini or speducci; this traditional Italian barbecue treat features as many different names as ways that it can be prepared.

Arrosticini is little more than meat on a stick, but rich in old-world tradition and brought to Canada by Italian immigrants from the Abruzzo region of Italy.

Not only does arrosticini serve a purpose in sustenance, but the portable and unique barbecue on which it's traditionally cooked has long carried a social value and importance.

Vaughan resident Joe Mannara and his family have turned their passion into a successful business, introducing it to all cultures.

Oak Ridges resident Johnny Ciccone regularly prepares arrosticini as a way to feed hundreds at his Italian social club, all the while sharing a tradition with young Italian-Canadians.

And Richmond Hill's Max Trotta remembers his family often using arrosticini as a social ice-breaker with new neighbours, upon immigrating from Italy to Toronto during the 1950s.

*'My dad would buy bicycle spokes and cook the lamb on those. I wouldn't recommend that now.'*

Arrosticini or speducci are the traditional names for what is essentially skewered lamb or sheep, on what looks like an elongated toothpick.

Traditionally, shepherds would whittle these sticks from branches of trees (similar in variety to willow trees, said Mr. Ciccone) but today, small skewers can be easily purchased.

The skewers are then placed over top a stand alone trough-shaped barbecue and depending on your arrosticini preparation rules and whether or not you purchased the barbecue, made it yourself or feel it's sacrilegious to let the meat touch a grill, you are in for a tasty treat.

"What makes it appealing is its simplicity," said Richmond Hill Italian Social Club arrosticini guru Mr. Ciccone.

"You make it simple, you cook it simple, you add salt and then you eat. You complicate and you ruin it," he added.

Simply put and simply enjoyed, the world of arrosticini can still seem complex in its variety, however.

If you're planning to give arrosticini a try, there are a variety of meats, barbecues, char-



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Johnny Ciccone shows off his speducci technique at the Richmond Hill Italian Social Club.

coal, and methods and, of course, a variety of names to become familiar with.

For many non-Italians and even Canadians of Italian descent, arrosticini is better known as 'speducci', or is simply known as 'spadooch'.

It's like a frankfurter, better known as a hotdog in North America, commented Mr. Mannara, owner of Vincentina Fine Foods.

"If you Google 'spiedini' you see the real stuff. You Google 'speducci', you get a bunch of guys standing around the grill on a driveway in Woodbridge," said Mr. Mannara with a laugh.

But no matter what you call it, this uniquely Italian-style grilling is an attention grabber, possessing the ability to gather friends or neighbours once the charcoal is lit and skewers are in place, Mr. Trotta recalled as a young immigrant to Canada.

He fondly remembers spending summer

afternoons at the park, while his father and uncle would cook up arrosticini.

Hailing from Abruzzo, the Trottas were accustomed to fashioning their own skewers for the arrosticini, but in Toronto, they couldn't find appropriate trees.

So, they improvised, recalled Mr. Trotta.

"My dad would buy bicycle spokes and cook the lamb on those. I wouldn't recommend that now. The spokes get pretty hot and who knows what chemicals were on those things," he added with a laugh.

As new Canadians in Toronto during the 1960s, Mr. Trotta remembers his fam-

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ily would often attract strange looks from passersby, but the smell of the lamb and his father's broken English invitations for a sample soon had the Trottas sharing the traditional taste with other Torontonians.

While the Trottas offered an early taste of arrosticini to the area, Mr. Mannara credits his family business with bringing the technology for pre-packaged arrosticini to Canada in the 1990s and, in effect, to the cultural masses of York Region.

He said he has seen more interest in arrosticini over the past 10 years.

"Each year, we have more and more people of all (cultural) backgrounds asking about spiedini. It's not just an Italian thing anymore," said Mr. Mannara,

"It's social and fun food. If we are having a family gathering; I will do up a box for the kids and before my son's hockey game I do up a box in the parking lot for all the parents," he added.

Sprinkled with sea salt to coax out the meat's juice, the meat skewers are best enjoyed straight off the grill, said Mr. Mannara.

Where Mr. Trotta's opinion is that arrosticini meat shouldn't touch a grill, Mr. Ciccone said it doesn't matter.

It's in these finer details, where the subtle intricacies of the speducci take shape.

Young, old, Italian or not; everyone has the "right way" to prepare arrosticini.

Where the men differ about how to do the grilling, all three agree hardwood charcoal and not briquettes should be used when cooking.

After pouring charcoal into the trough for lighting, Mr. Ciccone motioned to a home-made trough of sheet metal and concrete reinforcement bars that looked like it has spent many years in action.

One of the more arduous tasks of the arrosticini process is establishing and maintaining a good burn on the charcoal.

Mr. Trotta said he remembers as a kid the traditional way to do this was with a hand carved ping-pong paddle-like wooden tool.

However, as old world traditions have spread on to the next generations, it appears that even an arrosticini guru can learn new tricks.

"No, no paddle; I use an electric hair dryer," said Mr. Ciccone.

"Why would you want to stand there fanning it all day? Your arm gets tired!"



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