

## Polenta Soup

*Serves 4*

**6 tablespoons butter, divided**  
**1 onion, chopped**  
**1 quart (4 cups) milk**  
**2¼ cups water**  
**1¼ cups coarse polenta flour (cornmeal)**  
**Salt and pepper**  
**½ cup heavy cream**  
**½ cup grated Parmesan cheese**

1. Melt 3 tablespoons of the butter in a large pan, add the onion and cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, until lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, mix

together the milk and water in another pan and bring to just below simmering point, then remove from the heat.

2. Stir the polenta flour into the onion and cook, stirring continuously, for 2 to 3 minutes. Gradually stir in the warm milk and water. Season with salt and pepper to taste and cook for 1 hour. Stir in the cream, the remaining 3 tablespoons butter and the Parmesan cheese, and serve.

Adapted from “The Silver Spoon.”



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Polenta wedges are served on sausage in a tomato sauce.

## Polenta with Sausage

*Serves 4*

**1¼ cups coarse polenta flour (cornmeal)**  
**2 tablespoons butter**  
**7 ounces Italian sausages, cut into short lengths**  
**2 tablespoons olive oil**  
**1 onion, chopped, see note**  
**1 carrot chopped, see note**  
**1 celery rib chopped, see note**  
**2¼ cups strained tomatoes, see note**  
**Salt and pepper**

**Note:** Substitute your favorite tomato sauce for the one cooked in step 5, if you wish.

1. Bring 2½ cups of salted water to a boil, and have another pot with at least 2½ cups of salted water boiling also. Sprinkle the polenta flour into the first pot while continuously stirring. As soon as the polenta stiffens, soften it with a bit of the reserved hot water (polenta thickens with heat and softens with water). Cook, stirring frequently or constantly and adding hot water when needed until soft and smooth, about 45 minutes to 1 hour.

2. Pour the polenta into a

skillet or wide bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until set, at least 2 hours or up to overnight.

3. Slice the polenta into wedges. Melt 1 tablespoon of the butter in a skillet over medium-high heat. Fry half of the polenta wedges in the butter until golden brown, about 4 to 5 minutes per side. Do the same with the remaining half of the polenta wedges and remaining tablespoon of butter.

4. Prick the sausages, place in a dry skillet and cook over medium heat for 5 to 6 minutes, until the fat is rendered; then remove with a slotted spoon.

5. Heat the oil in the pan, add the onion, carrot and celery, and cook for 2 minutes. Pour in the tomatoes, season with salt and pepper to taste, and cook for 20 minutes.

6. Add the sausage to the tomato sauce and continue cooking for an additional 10 minutes. To serve, spoon the sausage and tomato sauce around the wedges of fried polenta.

—Adapted from “The Silver Spoon”

## Polenta with Ricotta

*Serves 8*

**2½ cups coarse polenta flour (cornmeal)**  
**1 (15-ounce) container, or 2 cups, ricotta cheese**  
**3 tablespoons olive oil**  
**1 onion, chopped**  
**2 ounces pancetta, diced**  
**3 tomatoes, peeled and diced**  
**2 tablespoons butter, plus extra for greasing**  
**¾ cup Parmesan cheese**  
**Salt and pepper**

1. Bring 5 cups of salted water to a boil, and have another pot with at least 5 cups of salted water boiling also. Sprinkle the polenta flour into the first pot while continuously stirring. As soon as the polenta stiffens, soften it with a bit of the reserved hot water (polenta thickens with heat and softens with water). Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently or constantly and adding hot water when

needed until soft and smooth, about 45 minutes to 1 hour.

2. Pour the polenta onto a counter or tray, and let cool and set, then cut it into slices. Beat the ricotta in a bowl until smooth.

3. Heat the oil in a small pan, add the onion and pancetta and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally for 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes, season with salt and pepper to taste, and simmer for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

4. Grease an 8-by-inch baking pan with butter. Arrange the polenta, ricotta, Parmesan and tomato sauce in layers in the prepared dish, finishing with a layer of polenta. Dot with the butter and bake 20 to 25 minutes (place the pan on a baking sheet if it threatens to boil or spill over).

—Adapted from “The Silver Spoon.”

## Polenta with Gorgonzola

*Serves 4*

**2½ cups coarse polenta flour (cornmeal)**  
**4 tablespoons butter, divided**  
**5 ounces Gorgonzola cheese, sliced**  
**Parmesan cheese to serve, optional**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

2. Bring 5 cups of salted water to a boil, and have another pot with at least 5 cups of salted water boiling also. Sprinkle the polenta flour into the first pot while continuously stirring. As soon as the polenta stiffens, soften it with a bit of the reserved hot water (polenta

thickens with heat and softens with water). Cook, stirring frequently or constantly and adding hot water when needed until soft and smooth, about 45 minutes to 1 hour.

3. Pour the polenta into individual ovenproof dishes while it is still hot. Put a piece of butter in the middle of each, pushing it down slightly into the polenta, and lay a small slice of Gorgonzola on top. Bake until the butter and Gorgonzola have completely melted. Serve with Parmesan, if desired.

—Adapted from “The Silver Spoon”

# Polenta

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version of “The Joy of Cooking” — it’s massive, comprehensive and is the most successful cookbook in Italian history.

“The Silver Spoon” method for cooking polenta calls for two pots of boiling, salted water. Into one, you slowly drizzle the cornmeal, stirring all the while. When the polenta in that pot starts to get too thick to stir, you add a ladle of boiling water from the other pot. Stir and add water. Stir and add water. And keep it up for 45 minutes to 1 hour until the corn has no raw taste whatsoever and the polenta is so smooth and creamy you almost can’t tell it has grains in it.

That’s the way I’ve made polenta ever since I bought the English translation of the book several years ago, and the results have been spectacular. But I always wondered if there were something else I could do to make it even better. Specifically, I wondered if I should apply the First Rule of Cooking: If something is made with water, it will taste better when made with stock.

So I cooked up a big batch, replacing perhaps one-third of the water with chicken stock. It definitely enhanced the flavor and made it stronger and more chickeny.

But I’m not convinced that’s a good thing. Instead of being meltingly delicious

and heartily smooth, it turned into a chicken dish with corn. It was quite good in its own right, and it would have been fine if I weren’t planning to gussy it up.

But one of the joys of polenta is the way it acts as a blank canvas. It absorbs the flavors of whatever you serve with it, and improves them. Even the most basic of additions, such as milk or butter or sauteed mushrooms, turns it into something glorious.

But I wanted better than glorious. I wanted transformative.

So I made polenta with sausage, because it gave me a chance to fry polenta, which is one of my favorite things. First you make a fairly firm polenta by using less water than you would for a soupier one. Then you let it set, slice it into wedges and fry them in plenty of butter. The polenta gets a wonderful golden crust on the outside and a warm, creamy inside.

I like to serve these fried polenta wedges with something earthy, such as beans, but I also wanted to make one dish with tomato sauce. So I paired it with tomato sauce and a spicy sausage, and it was superb. The polenta wedge buffered the richness of the other ingredients.

I next made polenta with ricotta (none of these recipe names is likely to win a recipe-name contest, but they probably sounded better in the original Italian). This is a layered dish with firm po-

lenta, ricotta cheese, Parmesan, tomato sauce and then more polenta. I made it two layers deep, and it baked up light and almost fluffy.

Think of it as lasagna with polenta instead of noodles. Now picture how great that tastes.

Polenta with Gorgonzola takes advantage of the unbeatable way polenta goes

with melted Gorgonzola, a highly flavored blue cheese (fontina is another great pairing). This one is simple: just make the polenta, add a pat of butter and a slice of Gorgonzola and heat until the cheese and butter melt.

I think my favorite polenta dish is the one I made last, polenta soup. This recipe

doesn’t even need all the time-consuming stirring. You simply saute onions, stir in some cornmeal and add warm milk and water.

Cook it for an hour, stirring occasionally, and you end up with something ... transformative.

It is a hearty, filling soup, thick and satisfying, that

tastes like onion-kissed corn. When you come in from a cold day in the snow, it is exactly what you will want.

It also costs about \$1.63 for a generous serving. Of course, you could also go to a fancy restaurant and pay 15 bucks for it. And it would be worth it.

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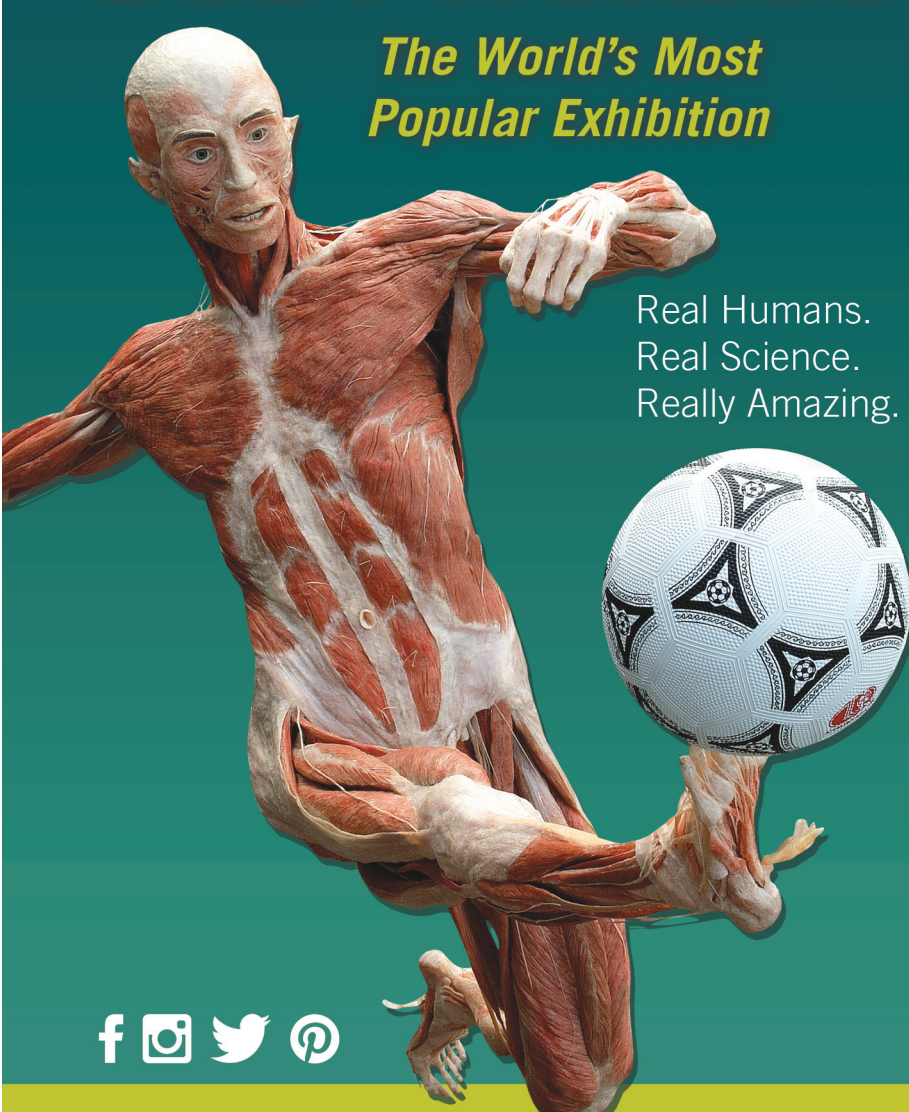


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