

The following two recipes I wanted to share with you are bursting with natural umami



Chef's Notes

A TASTE OF UMAMI

Laura Santini explains how the nominally Japanese concept of *umami* has actually been used in Italian cooking for centuries...

Umami is a Japanese term for 'deliciousness' and is known as the fifth taste – previously only sweet, sour, bitter and salty had been universally recognised. It was discovered in 1908 by the Japanese professor Kikunae Ikeda but has only recently been accepted by Western scientists when they found that umami did indeed have its own receptors on the tongue.

But what does it actually taste like? Well, think about those things that make you go 'mmmm' – the salty anchovy that melts into the tomato on a pizza, or the irresistible combination of pancetta and Parmesan in a carbonara. Umami is found naturally in lots of Italian ingredients – very ripe tomatoes, porcini, prosciutto and white truffles to name a few. It is like adding a natural flavour enhancer and is why many Italian cooks melt an anchovy into a sauce at the beginning of cooking: it doesn't make the sauce taste of anchovies but that extra kick is there.

In fact, if you match two very different ingredients recognised to be high in umami (think tomatoes and minced beef), the combined umami can

be increased up to the power of eight. That is also why the classic Italian carrot, onion and celery *soffritto* base plays such a key role in Italian cooking. Add this to the tomatoes and mince you have a natural flavour bomb bursting with flavour. Then top with Parmigiano Reggiano, one of the highest purveyors of umami in the world, and you have an extraordinary flavour bomb.

The following two recipes I wanted to share with you are bursting with natural umami. The first one is a quick supper solution: Chicken Roll, Wrap & Splash. Don't feel limited to applying these three steps to just chicken – they also work wonders with fish fillets, asparagus, scallops and mozzarella. The second recipe is the classic Bolognese, to which I have added my own Taste #5 Umami Paste, but you could replace this with an anchovy and a dash of Lea & Perrins Worcestershire sauce.

Once you've tried these recipes I'm sure you'll agree with me that even though the Japanese 'officially' discovered umami it is clear the Italians have been using umami – albeit unintentionally – in their cooking for hundreds of years. I like to think that umami can be translated into U-mamma! for all those lovers of Italian cooking.

Best Bolognese Ever

I migliori spaghetti alla bolognese

► SERVES 4 ► PREPARATION 15 minutes ► COOKING 1½ hours

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 150g pancetta, diced
- 150g chopped Portobello or chestnut mushrooms
- 1 onion, very finely chopped
- 1 carrot, grated
- 1 stick celery, very finely chopped
- 2 cloves of garlic, crushed
- 500g minced beef
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 3 bay leaves
- 400g can chopped tomatoes
- 125ml red wine (for extra deliciousness, I add an extra half glass of marsala)
- 125ml beef stock
- 4 tbsp tomato purée
- 2 tsp Taste #5 Umami Paste Original Mediterranean Recipe, or 1 anchovy and a dash of Worcestershire sauce
- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- spaghetti with grated Parmesan and chopped parsley to serve

Heat the oil in a large saucepan on a medium heat and fry the pancetta and mushrooms for 3-4 minutes, until browned and the fat of the pancetta is rendered.

Add the onion, carrot and celery and fry for 15 minutes, stirring regularly until the vegetables have begun to give off their liquid and caramelise slightly. Be patient with this stage, as waiting for the vegetables to cook down and caramelise properly will add a beautiful depth of flavour to the meat.

Finally, add the garlic and fry for a further couple of minutes. Remove the mixture from the pan and set aside.

Add the mince to the pan and fry for 8-10 minutes, stirring regularly until browned. Return the vegetables to the pan and add the oregano, bay leaves, tomatoes, red wine, stock, tomato purée and Taste #5 Umami paste. Bring to the boil and then lower the heat, cover and simmer for 45 minutes (if you have the time you can let this simmer for up to 3 hours on a very low heat, which will only increase its deliciousness!)

Taste and adjust the seasoning (this won't take much salt), and drizzle in some olive oil to finish. Serve with al dente spaghetti, grated Parmesan and chopped parsley, tossing the bolognese all the way through the pasta.



Chicken Roll, Wrap & Splash

Rotolo di pollo e prosciutto con vino e pepe nero

► SERVES 4

► PREPARATION 10 minutes

► COOKING 25 minutes

- 4 skinless chicken breasts
- 1-2 handfuls of grated Parmesan cheese
- a sprig of fresh rosemary, chopped
- a generous grinding of black pepper
- 8 slices of prosciutto crudo
- 4 small sprigs of rosemary
- a good dousing of extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tbsp Marsala or white wine

Remove the chicken breasts from the fridge half an hour before cooking and preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6.

ROLL each piece of chicken in the Parmesan, rosemary and pepper mixture. WRAP each chicken breast in 2 overlapping pieces of prosciutto, tucking the sprig of rosemary inside each parcel. Place in a roasting tin and tuck any excess prosciutto under the chicken pieces. SPLASH with olive oil and season with another grind of black pepper.

Put in the oven and bake for 20-25 minutes. Three quarters of the way through cooking add the Marsala or wine. The dish is done when the prosciutto has darkened slightly and the chicken is cooked through.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"If I were to be so frank I would print the words Cognitive Cook, because my work is all about exploring the inextricable link between flavours and feelings. For me it is about learning to taste what you feel and feel what you taste, it is a desire to understand and recognize the ingredients that affect the flavour of your life both in and out of the kitchen."
Laura Santini, author and restaurateur