

Crespelle with Prosciutto and Fontina



For the crespelle
1 1/2 cups (6 oz/185 g)
all-purpose (plain) flour
2 cups (16 fl oz/500 ml)
whole milk
4 large eggs
1 teaspoon salt

Olive oil or canola oil
2 cups (16 fl oz/500 ml) white sauce (page 273)
12 pieces paper thin sliced prosciutto di Parma
1/2 lb (250 g) Valle d'Aosta Fontina cheese, rind
trimmed
1/2 cup (2 oz/60) grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

In Emilia-Romagna, thin, eggy crêpes, called crespelle, sometimes take the place of pasta. This dish is perfect for a dinner party, since both the sauce and the crespelle can be made up to 2 days before serving, or the entire dish can be assembled and refrigerated for up to 24 hours before you bake it. To make the crespelle, in a large bowl, whisk together the flour, milk, eggs, and salt until smooth. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or overnight. Meanwhile, prepare the white sauce and set aside.

White Sauce

3 cups (24 fl oz/750 ml) whole milk
6 tablespoons (3 oz/90 g) unsalted butter
6 tablespoons (2 oz/60 g) all-purpose (plain) flour
1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg (see the microplane)
Sea salt

In a saucepan over medium heat, heat the milk until small bubbles appear around the edges of the pan, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat.

Meanwhile, in a heavy, nonstick saucepan over medium-low heat, melt the butter. Using a wooden spoon, stir in the flour and cook, stirring constantly, until a thick, smooth paste forms, 3-4 minutes. Remove from the heat.

Slowly drizzle 1-2 tablespoons of the hot milk into the flour paste while whisking constantly. The mixture will immediately become thick and lumpy. Continuing to whisk vigorously, add the milk about 2 tablespoons at a time. The sauce will gradually become smooth. After adding about 1/2 cup (4 fl oz/125 ml) of the milk, slowly add the remaining milk in a thin, steady stream while whisking constantly.

Stir in 1/2 teaspoon salt and nutmeg, return the pan to medium heat, and cook, stirring constantly, until the sauce is smooth and thick enough to coat the back of the spoon, about 1 minute.

Use immediately, or let cool, cover, and refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 2 days. Reheat over low heat, stirring constantly and adding a little hot water or milk to thin, if necessary.

Makes about 2 cups (16 fl oz/500 ml)

Heat a 6-inch (15-cm) crêpe pan or nonstick frying pan (I brought one) over medium heat. When the pan is hot, brush it very lightly with oil. Scoop up a scant 1/4 cup (2 fl oz/ 60 ml) of the batter, add to the pan, and tilt and swirl the pan to spread the batter evenly over the bottom. Pour any excess batter back into the bowl. Cook the crespelle until the edges begin to brown and lift away from the pan sides, about 1 minute, then flip and cook until spotted with brown, about 30 seconds. Slide onto a plate, and cover with a piece of waxed paper. Repeat with the remaining batter, stacking the crespelle and separating them with waxed paper. You should have at least 24 crespelle.

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 375°F (190°C). Butter two 9-by-13-by-2-inch (23-by-33-by-5-cm) baking dishes.

Spread a thin layer of the white sauce in the bottom of a baking pan. Cut the prosciutto and Fontina into pieces equal to the number of crespelle. Stack a piece of the prosciutto and a slice of the Fontina on one-half of the crespelle, fold them in half, covering the prosciutto and cheese, and then fold into quarters. Place in the baking pan. Fill and fold the remaining crespelle in the same way and arrange them, overlapping slightly, in the dishes. Spread the remaining sauce over the crespelle, dividing it evenly between the dishes. Sprinkle the Parmigiano-Reggiano evenly over the top.

Bake until the sauce is lightly browned on the surface and the cheese is bubbling, about 30 minutes. Serve at once.

MAKES 10-12 SERVINGS