

RICOTTA POTATO GNOCCHI WITH CREAMY PESTO SAUCE



Classic gnocchi are made with a starchy Russet potato that give these light, airy and pillowy dumplings their texture. Adding ricotta to the gnocchi gives them an even lighter texture. Gnocchi are referred to by many different names and are made in nearly every corner of Italy, but have their origins from northern Italy where the climate is cooler and better suited to growing potatoes. A number of other healthier Italian cuisine also come from Northern Italy, like risotto and polenta.

My parents were farmers “contadini” before coming here and were passionate about sharing with their daughters their knowledge of homegrown ingredients to make simple Ligurian cuisine, like polenta, risotto and gnocchi.

You can enhance the flavor of gnocchi by adding different ingredients such as peas, spinach, or mint. Making them with beets and ricotta will produce a stunning shade of purple color that don’t need any sauce but olive oil, balsamic vinegar, and parmesan cheese, or a pumpkin and ricotta gnocchi. For a gluten-free option use sweet potato and brown rice flour. You can use Gorgonzola cream sauce or just simple brown butter. When gnocchi are tossed with a classic pesto Genovese, they become a popular Ligurian dish.

This ricotta potato gnocchi are made with homemade ricotta which is incredibly easy to make at home, and your results will be far superior to most store-bought ricotta. Any leftover ricotta is great on crostini, in lasagna, on toast drizzled with honey and so much more.

RICOTTA INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups of milk (makes about 1 cup of ricotta)
- 1 lemon juiced (can also use same quantity of white vinegar)
- 1 tsp. salt (optional)

DIRECTIONS

1. Pour milk into a pot and with medium heat begin to heat until the milk gets foamy and starts to steam and bubble, and begins to boil. Remove the pot from heat once boiled.
2. Add the lemon juice and salt (if using). Stir with a plastic spatula then let the milk sit for 10 minutes to allow the whey (watery, yellow-colored liquid) to separate from the clumps. If you find a lot of un-separated milk add another tablespoon of lemon juice.
3. Strain the curds through a strainer with cheese cloth. Let them drain for about 30-60 minutes, depending on how wet or dry you prefer your ricotta. If the ricotta becomes too dry you can stir in some of the whey. For a softer, creamier, and more spreadable consistency, whisk the ricotta with a fork, breaking down the granules and do not drain for as long a period.
4. Fresh homemade ricotta has a much better flavor than grocery store ricotta. If you don't use all the ricotta can refrigerate in an airtight container up to 4-5 days.

TIPS FOR MAKING RICOTTA

1. Use whole milk which makes for a creamy ricotta or use equal portions of whole milk and 2%. AVOID using skim or nonfat milks as they don't separate easily into curds and whey.
2. The more you drain the ricotta the less you will end up with and the drier it will be.
3. Don't use Meyer lemons to make homemade ricotta because they do not have the same level of acidity as regular lemons.
4. Fresh ricotta can be used right away or refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 4-5 days

GNOCCHI INGREDIENTS

- 3 medium (2 large) Russet potatoes because they are starchy
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour (may not need all the flour)
- 1/2 cup whole milk ricotta
- 1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan (sprinkle on top)
- 1 large egg
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F, if baking potatoes. Pierce potatoes with a fork; place onto baking sheet, bake until tender, about 1 hour.
2. Can also boil potatoes, cook about 45 minutes. Boil whole with skins on to reduce the amount of moisture the potato will absorb. When fork easily pierces potatoes, they are done. Remove from water and let cool until you can handle to remove skin.
3. For baked potatoes, cut in half and scoop flesh into a medium bowl and put through ricer. For boiled potatoes remove skins and put through ricer. Transfer 1 1/2 cups of mashed potatoes to a large bowl; stir in flour, ricotta, egg, and 3/4 teaspoon salt. If your ricotta is a little wetter you can add a little more flour. Adding too much flour will make dough tough.
4. Working on a lightly floured surface, cut off a small piece of dough and roll each piece into an 18-inch-long rope, about 3/4 inch in diameter, sprinkle with additional flour as needed to prevent sticking. Using a sharp knife, cut each rope into 3/4-inch bite-size pieces.
5. Using a wooden Gnocchi Paddle or board it makes grooves in the surface giving their classic texture. Roll pieces down the board using your thumb, but sure to start at the top of the board; transfer to a baking sheet.
6. Using a form method, roll the pieces down the tines of the fork to create ridges in the gnocchi; transfer to a baking sheet.
7. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil; cook gnocchi until tender, stirring occasionally, about 2-3 minutes or until gnocchi rise to top of pot which indicates they are done.
8. Using a slotted spoon, drain the gnocchi well and transfer to a bowl.

9. Toss cooked gnocchi with the pesto sauce and sprinkle with grated parmesan cheese. If you want your pesto a little creamier add some cream cheese to the pesto. Also make sure to add some water you cooked gnocchi in to the pesto.

TIPS FOR MAKING GNOCCHI

1. For best results, use a starchy potato like a **russet** (Idaho or baking potato) instead of Yukon Gold.
2. For either baked or boiled potatoes, be sure to let moisture steam out of the mash so your gnocchi dough won't be soggy.
3. Press cooked potatoes through a potato ricer for a smooth consistency. Spread out the mash to let more moisture evaporate.
4. The amount of flour you use depends on how much water your potato absorbs during cooking and the wetness of your ricotta: Boiling absorbs the most and baking or microwaving absorbs the least.
5. Avoid overworking the dough.
6. Cut the dough into small pieces and roll each into "snakes" with the palms of your hands rather than your fingertips.
7. Cut the snakes into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch pieces. Roll each piece against the tines of a fork (front or back) to impress the signature ridges.

