

#8 Chard and Cheese Bread Gateau

Little story: my galley kitchen was alas not only MINE, I had to share its premises and sometimes the consequences of this sharing led to a certain number of surprises. Ingredients would disappear; the third egg needed to make the almond cake just right, the slab of lardo to improve the planned sauce, the sausage that got boiled up to feed a hungry child that I was counting on as someone's dinner portion... the list is endless. There were also sporadic outbreaks of bread surprises. Bits of old bread were found in various paper bags all over the galley shelf space. No one collected nor regrouped these bits that lay around with nowhere to go, no mouths would interest them. Larger newer loaves were always more alluring, little leftover bits got hidden amongst others until I put a stop to this ridiculous habit.

This is a wonderful end to a story that could have lead to a lot of throwing out, in fact the older the bread of course (hence the better collections of bits you have) the merrier the taste of this gateau is. The bietola (Swiss Chard) I found at the Rochella Ionica market is sweeter than the French variety. It is also quite a showstopper once unmolded.

Boat tip: Make the gateau the day before and let it sit soaking in the refrigerator overnight and you've got the meal all prepared for the next day.

Serves 8

About 1 kilo Swiss Chard, washed and dried, thick stems removed, leaves coarsely chopped

1 red onion, finely minced

2 paper-thin slices of smoked lardo, cut into thin strips

3 Tbsp Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

3 Cups of a variety of grated cheese- Parmigiano Reggiano, Pecorino, Cacio

2 Cups Milk

9 eggs

About 1/2 Kilo old bread, cut up into big cubes

Equipment: a round ten-inch cake pan with 2-inch sides

1. In a large frying pan heat the olive oil over medium high heat. Add the onion, turn down the heat to low, and cook until soft and translucent, about 5 minutes. Remove the onion to a side plate. Raise the heat to medium high again and add the Swiss chard, cook stirring until the leaves have wilted. Remove the Swiss chard and add to the plate with the onion. Add the lardo and cook until softened through.
2. In a bowl mix together the eggs and milk until well incorporated.
3. Cover the cake pan with a layer of bread, then some Swiss chard, onion, lardo and a sprinkling of cheese, salt and pepper. Continue in this fashion until all the ingredients are used up. Pour over the milk and egg mixture. Cover with foil and keep in the fridge at least ten hours, preferably overnight.
4. Put the gateau in a pre-heated high temperature oven (180° F in a normal oven) with the foil on until nicely set, about 35 minutes. Take off the foil and

continue cooking until brown and crispy all over, about another 50 minutes.
Unmold and serve warm in slices.