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COOL Therapy

Once a treat reserved for royalty, gelato has become a global favorite, and experts from Gelato University in Bologna teach us how to make it at home.

According to ancient tablets, about 12,000 B.C., runners from Mesopotamia raced 60 miles up mountains to get ice to cool drinks for celebrations in the Royal Palace of Mari. Thus began the great tradition of frozen refreshments, which over the years has evolved into many variations, including Italy's beloved treat: gelato. This is one of the many fun facts I learned during my day at Gelato University. The school's main campus is outside Bologna, but a pop-up version was set up in Southern California recently, giving a group of us the delightful opportunity to get a backstage experience of gelato-making and lore. In the lead was Luciano Ferrari, a passionate expert from the Emilia Romagna region who has been dedicating himself to the study and teaching of gelato for decades.

I've always loved the story Florentines tell of a Medici banquet in the Renaissance, where Buontalenti (the family's architect) whipped up milk, eggs, and sugar to impress guests at a banquet for Francesco I. When refrigeration was invented, gelato was no longer an indulgence exclusive to royalty, but became a pleasure for the masses. Today there are about 39,000 gelaterias in Italy, and the craze for what some call "Italian ice cream" has spread all over the world, with 900 official gelato shops now in the USA.

by Susan Van Allen

PHOTO: JANET WYLIE/SETH CHANDLER



The Recipes

Coffee Gelato

- 2 cups milk
- ½ cup sugar
- 3 egg yolks
- 1 tablespoon Nescafe coffee granules
- 1 ounce espresso coffee

Prepare a bain marie-style cooling set-up by filling a large bowl with ice water and placing a smaller bowl inside it to hold the gelato mixture for cooling.

Boil the milk, not scalding it. With an electric mixer, mix together the egg yolks and sugar. Add the mixture to the boiled milk and blend. Add the Nescafe granules and espresso, mixing until well blended. Pour the mixture into the inner bowl of the bain marie and let it cool. Place the bowl in the freezer and freeze until firm.

Makes 6 servings.

With an electric mixer, blend the strawberries, sugar, and lemon juice until you obtain a smooth mix. Transfer to a bowl that contains the water and stir until well blended. Place the bowl in the freezer and freeze until firm.

Makes 6 servings.

Chocolate Gelato

- 2 cups milk
- ⅓ cup sugar
- 3 egg yolks
- ¼ cup cocoa powder

Prepare a bain marie-style cooling set-up by filling a large bowl with ice water and placing a smaller bowl inside it to hold the gelato mixture for cooling.

Boil the milk, not scalding it. With an electric mixer, mix the egg yolks with the sugar and cocoa powder and then add it to the boiled milk, stirring continuously. Transfer the mix to the inner bowl of the bain marie and let it cool. Place the bowl in the freezer and freeze until firm.

Makes 6 servings.

Strawberry Sorbetto

- 2 cups sliced strawberries
- 1 cup sugar
- Juice of 1 lemon
- ⅞ cup water



DOLCI

“What’s the difference between gelato and ice cream?” was a focus for Luciano’s introduction. First of all, it’s the ingredients. Gelato is made with milk, while cream is, of course, the base for ice cream. Water replaces milk in fruit flavors, which in Italy are called sorbetti. This leads to a major difference in fat content: gelato=4.6 percent, sorbetto=0 percent, and ice cream between 10 and 18 percent, sometimes going as high as 30 percent. Also, gelato is processed differently than ice cream, whipped up with less air, so it’s denser. And it’s served at a warmer temperature, so eating gelato never brings on an “ice cream headache.” Thickness and temperature create an immediately richer experience for the taste buds, which is the reason why we tend to eat smaller portions of gelato in comparison to ice cream. (Note to

Self: gelato is a dieter’s dream choice!)

Our lesson moved into the kitchen, where we tied on aprons and were each given recipes to create a variety of flavors. I mixed banana, milk, and sugar together, poured it into a high-tech Carpigiani professional machine, pressed a button, and within 10 minutes a delicious surge of ivory colored goodness emerged. “Banana gelato should never be yellow,” Luciano said. “If it is, that means something artificial was added to the mix. Remember, if you see monkeys in the zoo eating a banana, they throw the yellow peel out—even they know you’re not supposed to eat that!”

Cups of pistachio, strawberry, and straciatella (vanilla flecked with chocolate) gelato were set before me to taste my fellow classmates’ creations. Each one burst with distinc-

tive, fresh, creamy flavors. As we all indulged, I looked around to see I was surrounded by a kitchen full of smiles. “This is the best thing about gelato,” Luciano said. “It brings happiness.”

Luciano has ingeniously invented simple recipes so we can create gelato in our own kitchens without the use of those professional machines, and celebrate summer with delicious Italian gelato. If you can’t get there in person, check out Gelato University at gelatouniversity.com

Susan Van Allen is the author of *100 Places in Italy Every Woman Should Go*; *Letters from Italy: Confessions, Adventures, and Advice*; *50 Places in Rome, Florence, and Venice Every Woman Should Go*, and the *Golden Days in Italy* blog. She travels frequently to Italy, the native land of her grandparents, and lives in Los Angeles. susanvanallen.com

PHOTOS: JANET WYLE/SETH CHANDLER



GELATO with fruit.



SUSAN VAN ALLEN ENJOYS THE FRUITS OF HER training at Gelato University.