

polenta frita croccante con rosmarino e sale

serves 4

fried crispy polenta with rosemary and salt

In village streets and markets around Italy you'll very often see little trailers with heated glass serving areas selling a whole bunch of fritto misto (deep-fried vegetables). These are lovely, but sometimes I've also been lucky enough to find a street vendor selling fried polenta – this isn't usually included as part of a fritto misto but it's a real joy. The nearest thing I can liken it to is a chip, but polenta is slightly less absorbent to the oil and the Parmesan gives it a really nice rich flavour. In the past I've also added things like chopped chilli, different herbs like oregano or marjoram, even fennel seeds or sun-dried tomatoes. None of the latter additions are particularly classic or authentic but the results were very good. Whether you have it as munchies or tossed in a nice salad, or even serve it instead of chips, fried polenta is really tasty – so give it a bash.

A warning: when you fry with oil like this, it's really important not to try to do other jobs at the same time. Stay focused on the pan and keep any kids away from it.

1 x firm polenta recipe (see page 269)
a handful of freshly grated Parmesan cheese
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 handfuls of uncooked polenta grains,
for dusting

2 litres/3½ pints sunflower oil, for frying
a handful of fresh rosemary, leaves picked

First, make your polenta – when you remove it from the heat, stir in the Parmesan and season to taste. Spread it out on an oiled tray or work surface until it's 2.5cm/1 inch thick – when it has cooled down and set, tear or cut it into large thumb-sized pieces. As far as I'm concerned, the rougher the better! Dust all the pieces with the uncooked polenta, as this will give them a nice crunch when fried.

Place a deep pan on a high heat and add the sunflower oil. Put a piece of potato into the oil – when it's frying good and fast, the oil will be at the perfect temperature. If you have a cooking thermometer, use that – you want the oil to be 180°C/350°F. If it gets too hot and starts smoking, use your common sense and turn the heat down. Put a handful of polenta into a small sieve and carefully lower the pieces into the oil – if they sink and nothing seems to be happening, more heat is required. If they're frying nicely, Bob's your uncle! I haven't seen this done in Italy but after 4 minutes of cooking, when the polenta is crispy, for the last 20 seconds of cooking I like to add a handful of picked rosemary – this gives incredible flavour and crunch. Carefully remove the polenta and rosemary with your sieve or a slotted spoon and put them on some kitchen paper. Dust with sea salt and serve immediately to your guests as pre-dinner nibbles or in a bowl as an accompaniment.