

## The Basic Art of Italian Cooking: Holidays & Special Occasions

**Maria Liberati**

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This is the second edition of the second book in Maria Liberati's Basic Art of Italian Cooking series: *The Basic Art of Italian Cooking: Holidays & Special Occasions*. This book focuses on cooking for celebrations, and its first edition won the 2009 Gourmand World Cookbook Awards for Best Italian Cuisine Book in the USA. It will surely be a celebrated addition to any foodie's kitchen shelf. The book moves through the yearly calendar of holidays, beginning with Christmas Eve, a meal often celebrated in the United States. Liberati moves on to the lesser-known Feast of the Seven Fishes, a sumptuous Christmas Day meal, a celebratory New Year's Eve and Day, *La Befana*, Valentine's Day, and *Carnevale* (a feast rooted in Italian Roman history). The author has assigned each festive occasion a few recipes for each course: appetizers, first course, second course, desserts, and even beverages. Recipes each receive their own page, with Italian dish names translated into English for an American audience. At times, helpful tips related to food or table presentation are inserted along the bottom of the page.

The book's straightforwardness and charisma comes as much from its tone as its format of condensed, manageable 'holiday' chapters. In each section, the author introduces readers to the origins and significance of the meal by giving an anecdote from her own family experiences in her house in Italy. These stories lend a personal warmth, authenticity, and simplicity that making readers feel that they might be in an Italian country house, chatting with extended family members while the meal is being prepared. The recipes themselves are written simply, without jargon, and are accessible to cooks just beginning to dabble in authentic Italian cuisine. Liberati has also thoughtfully included a combined glossary and index of sorts in the rear, to help readers navigate the many Italian words throughout the book. The only thing left wanting in this volume is the occasional photograph of a dish, either finished or in progress, which would be especially helpful to the novice cook.

When the holidays roll around, Liberati's book might be a wonderful gift book for that gourmet chef in your life or the student of food culture, or for your own enjoyment.

GABRIELA WORREL (October 18, 2010)

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