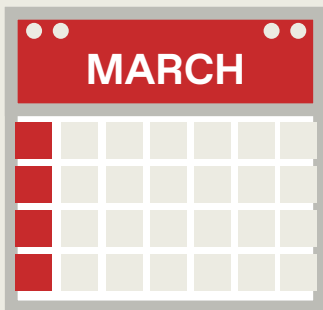
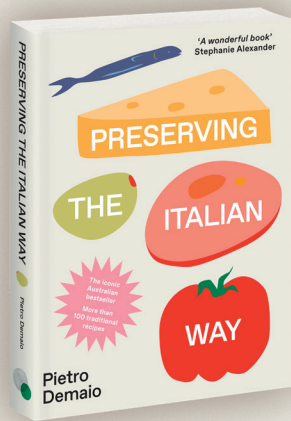


PRESERVING THE ITALIAN WAY

Pietro Demaio

Ciccio's dried figs

Fichi secchi di Ciccio



The best figs for drying are Turkish brown; the small green ones that are golden yellow to amber on the inside. Ideally you would grow them yourself, leaving them on the tree for as long as you can so they become as sweet as possible. But figs are widely available at farmers' markets when in season too.

After picking or buying your figs, place them on a wire rack or fine mesh tray (anything where air can easily circulate) and slightly flatten them. Place them out in the sun every day (bringing them inside at night) and turn them over every second day until they take on a honey colour all over. The whole process takes about 5 days, depending on how constant the sun is! Alternatively, use a dehydrator. Make sure the figs are still slightly firm to press but not moist.

From here there are a number of variations from my mate Ciccio:

Secche al forno

Open up the figs, thread them onto bamboo skewers (which you have pre-soaked in water), then place them in a 120°C (fan-forced) oven for approximately 1 hour or until slightly brown. Allow to cool, then serve. These will keep in an airtight container in the pantry for up to 1 year.

Fichi i padruni

Press several dried figs together to make a ball roughly 10 cm in diameter. Wrap the fig ball in fig leaves and tie up firmly with string. Place in a 120°C (fan-forced) oven for approximately 1 hour. When unwrapped, the figs will be slightly brown and caramelised. They will keep for several months in an airtight container in the pantry.

I crucetti

Cut the dried figs in half without cutting through the stem (so they open up to look a bit like dumbbells). In each half, place an almond or walnut. You can also add a small piece of fresh lemon or orange peel.

Take two of the opened up figs and carefully place the cut surfaces together. Repeat with the remaining figs (so if you had 16 figs, you should now have eight pieces). Arrange the figs on a baking tray so that they cross each other at the stem, forming a crucifix (*i crucetti*). Sprinkle with sugar and place in a 150°C (fan-forced) oven for 30 minutes or until the sugar caramelises. These will last a long time (rather, they *would* keep a long time but they will be eaten quickly!); up to 1 year, so I'm told. When storing, layer them in containers with dried bay leaves and fine slices of orange peel, then sprinkle with sugar and cover with a lid.

