

POLENTA TORTE with goat cheese sauce

R.S.V.P.

OUR FAVORITE RESTAURANT IS CLOSE to home, in the small town of Lansing, Illinois. It's called Cafe Borgia, and they offer an incredible polenta appetizer topped with a creamy goat cheese sauce. My husband and I were both raised in Italian households and have never tasted polenta like this.

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POLENTA TORTE WITH GOAT CHEESE SAUCE

6 SERVINGS

POLENTA

- 4 ounces pancetta* or bacon, chopped
- ½ 10-ounce package frozen chopped spinach, thawed, well drained

- 4 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1½ cups yellow cornmeal
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese (about 1½ ounces)
- ½ cup diced drained roasted red bell peppers, available packed in jars

SAUCE

- 1 cup whipping cream
- 2 tablespoons (¼ stick) unsalted butter
- 4 ounces soft mild goat cheese, crumbled

- All purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons (about) olive oil

FOR POLENTA: Butter 9-inch deep-dish glass pie dish. Cook pancetta in heavy medium skillet over medium heat until crisp. Transfer to bowl using slotted spoon. Mix in spinach. Set aside.

Bring water and salt to boil in heavy large saucepan. Gradually add cornmeal, whisking constantly. Reduce heat to low and cook until tender and very thick, stirring frequently, about 5 minutes. Mix in cheese. Spoon 2 cups polenta into prepared dish; smooth top. Cover with spinach mixture. Spoon 1 cup polenta over; smooth top. Sprinkle with red bell peppers. Spoon remaining polenta over, spreading evenly. Cover and refrigerate until firm, at least 3 hours or overnight.

FOR SAUCE: Bring cream and butter to simmer in heavy large saucepan. Add cheese and whisk until smooth. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Set aside.

Cut polenta into 8 wedges. Dust each polenta wedge with flour. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in heavy large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add polenta wedges and cook until brown and heated through, adding more oil as necessary, about 8 minutes per side. Transfer to plates. Bring sauce to simmer. Spoon over polenta.

*Pancetta, Italian smoked bacon cured in salt, is available at Italian markets and some specialty foods stores.

