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What's Cooking in the Kitchen of: Wally Maria Mazzucco Wyatt

Wally Maria Mazzucco Wyatt is passionate about many things, especially her family, her home, her Italian heritage and her Italian food. What a wonderful treat it was to interview such a unique member of our Weaverville community.

Wally Maria was born in Bel-luno, Italy, and grew up in Pordenone, a city located north of Venice. She met her husband, Leo, while he was stationed at an Air Force Base in Aviano, Italy. They married in 1975 and immediately moved to the United States.

Following Leo's military retirement, they decided to make Asheville their home in 1980. Wally Maria and Leo have one daughter, Denise, and they have lived in Weaverville since 2004.

Cooking was a major part of Wally Maria's family history in Italy. As a young girl, she recalls spending time daily with her mother, aunt and grandmother in the kitchen of their family-owned hotel and restaurant. Together, they prepared countless Italian dishes for their family and guests. Traditional northern Italian cooking is rich in cheeses, fresh fruits, vegetables and, of course, pasta. She loves to watch things grow in her garden, especially when it is an herb or vegetable to use in one of her favorite dishes.

Although she has worked in several restaurants as an adult, she had a unique opportunity offered to her about seven years ago; she was asked to teach Italian and Italian cooking classes at Blue Ridge Community College.

"I couldn't believe how much I loved to teach," Wally Maria stated. Within a few more years, she was given another opportunity to teach, but this time at Asheville-Buncombe Community Technical College where she has been teaching Italian for the past four years.

"I am amazed at how much interest in Italy there is in the Asheville community," she says. Although she no longer teaches at Blue Ridge, she continues to enjoy her Italian classes at AB Tech. She currently teaches 4 different classes, I-IV, and enjoys the interesting students she meets and the chance to share about the country she loves. Wally Maria also began teaching Italian cooking out of her home about three years ago and holds 3-4 classes each year that include up to eight students per class. She also teaches various cooking seminars throughout Western North Carolina each year.

If you are interested in participating in one of her upcoming Italian cooking classes or seminars, you may contact her at 828-658-8928. Within a few more weeks, you can also gather more information about Wally Maria's classes by going to her new website, www.discoveritalian.com. Below are a few of her favorite Italian dishes:

Linguine with Shrimp & Broccoli

1 lb medium or large shrimp
3 garlic cloves, minced
8 tbsp. olive oil
1 bunch broccoli
1 lb linguine
1/3 cup Italian parsley
Zest of 1 untreated lemon, grated fine
1 pinch chili pepper flakes (optional)

Shell shrimp, de-vein, rinse and dry. Cut broccoli into medium florets, wash and dry. Wash and chop parsley. Combine shrimp, garlic, pepper flakes and 4 tbsp. of olive oil in a bowl. Place in the refrigerator to marinate for one to four hours. Bring a large pot of water to a boil, add salt and linguine, and cook until al dente (firm to the bite). At the same time, in a large saucepan, heat the remaining oil, add the broccoli and cook over medium high heat, tossing frequently. When almost ready, add shrimp and marinade. Sauté until shrimp are pink (1-2 minutes). Add salt to taste. Drain pasta, place it back in the cooking pot and add all the shrimp-broccoli sauce. Toss and arrange in dish and sprinkle with parsley and lemon zest. Makes 4-6 servings.

Elderberry Granita with Blackberry Mousse

2 cups elderberries, washed (other berries can be substituted)
2 cups water
3/4 cup of sugar
1/3 cup blackberries
1 cup whipping cream
3 tbsp. sugar
salt to taste

Place elderberries and water in saucepan. Bring to a gentle boil and simmer for 20 minutes. Strain and squeeze out all juices. Discard berries and add 3/4 cup sugar to the liquid; stir until all sugar is dissolved. Cool. Place in a pan and place it in the freezer. Stir the contents every 20 minutes with a fork until crystals form. Crush blackberries in a bowl and add sugar. Whip the cream with a pinch of salt until firm. Add blackberry mixture. Freeze until firm but not hard. Makes 6 servings. To serve: divide the elderberries crystals in 6 wide goblets, place on top of a dollop of blackberry mousse, and serve immediately.

Goat Cheese and Rucola Bruschetta

12 oz. goat cheese
1/2 cup chopped rucola
olive oil, extra virgin
1 large garlic clove, peeled
salt and pepper to taste

In a small bowl, place goat cheese and rucola. Mix well with a fork and drizzle olive oil. Add a little salt and plenty of pepper. Toast some slices of rustic loaf bread (French loaf is fine) while it is still hot. Brush with garlic clove and spread with goat cheese spread.

Zucchini Focaccia

3 slender zucchini
1 envelope dried yeast
1 tsp. sugar
2 1/2 cups all purpose unbleached flour
3/4 cup warm water
1 tsp. salt
3 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tbsp. corn meal or semolina
3 tbsp. olive oil, plus extra for glazing

2 tsp. finely crushed sea salt
Wash zucchini and thinly slice horizontally. Coat with one tablespoon olive oil and cook zucchini in a large frying pan or grill until tender. Set zucchini aside. Combine yeast, sugar, 1 teaspoon flour, and the water in a small bowl. Stand, covered, in a warm place for 10 minutes or until foamy. Sift the remaining flour and salt into a large bowl. Add the garlic and stir with a knife to combine. Make a well in the center, stir in yeast mixture and olive oil. Using a flat-bladed knife, mix to a firm dough. Turn out the dough on to a lightly floured surface and knead for 10 minutes. Shape into a ball, and place in a large, lightly oiled mixing bowl. Stand, covered, in a warm place for 40 minutes or until well risen. Sprinkle base of 7 x 11 shallow baking pan with cornmeal. Knead dough for two minutes or until smooth. Press dough into pan and prick deep holes in it with a skewer. Sprinkle lightly with water and place in a preheated oven at 400 degrees. Bake for 10 minutes and sprinkle again with water. Bake further for 10 minutes. Add zucchini, brush with extra olive oil, sprinkle with sea salt, and then bake for five more minutes. Cut into squares and serve warm or at room temperature.

This report filed by Loren Metts for the Tribune.