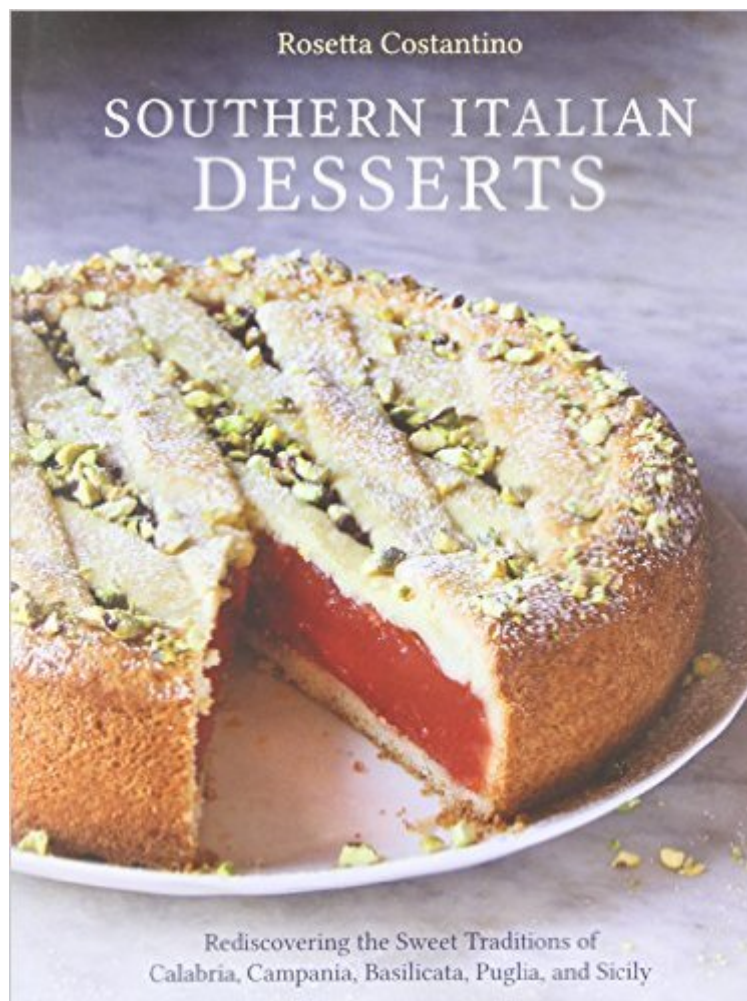


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Southern Italian Desserts: Rediscovering The Sweet Traditions Of Calabria, Campania, Basilicata, Puglia, And Sicily



Synopsis

An authentic guide to the festive, mouthwatering sweets of Southern Italy, including regional specialties that are virtually unknown in this country as well as variations on more popular desserts such as cannoli, biscotti, and gelato. In *Southern Italian Desserts*, author of the acclaimed *My Calabria*, Rosetta Costantino, collects seventy-five favorite recipes from the regions of Calabria, Campania, Basilicata, Puglia, and Sicily. These picturesque areas have a rich history of beautiful desserts, many of them tied to holidays and festivals. For example, Zeppole di San Giuseppe are doughnut-like pastries topped with cream and cherries, traditionally made in Campania for the celebration of Father's Day. And the Sicilian chilled watermelon pudding Gelo di Mellone is a refreshing dish served in summer for the festival of Palermo's patron saint, Rosalia. Other desserts such as persimmon gelato, chocolate-dipped figs stuffed with almonds and candied orange peel, and chocolate-hazelnut cake rolls celebrate Southern Italy's local bounty and traditional foods. With recipes for more familiar Italian desserts such as cannoli and gelato, as well as deliciously obscure sweets such as rich cassatas, almond-flecked cookies, and flaky cream-filled sfogliatelle pastries, *Southern Italian Desserts* features a treat for every occasion. In addition to explaining the regional history, symbolism, and lore behind the desserts, Costantino teaches you how to stock your dessert pantry and provides all of the foundational recipes you need to embark on a sweet tour of the Italian south from your kitchen. This delightful confection of a cookbook will expand your dessert repertoire and leave you dreaming of Italy. Buon appetito!

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Customer Reviews

I spent 24 hours reading this book (okay, e-book) straight through. I live in Calabria, very near the author's birthplace. She's correct - I have also wandered Calabria, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, e Sicilia and found these desserts to be some of the finest anywhere. Now I have an easy source for making my own! Recipes are easy to follow, authentic to what is found in my pasticcerie in Scalea, and I have gained at least fifty pounds drooling over the pages! It was the pears filled with ricotta and drizzled with chocolate that did me in. It's good to be Italian. Enjoy the book!

What I know about traditional southern Italian desserts, you could put in a pistachio shell. Gelato. Cannolis. That's about it. Sad, huh? The picture on the front of this book stopped me in my tracks. What WAS that? Watermelon? In a pie or pudding? Whoa. That sounded like the best kind of food crazy. I needed to know more. Not only is this a beautiful book with clear instructions and unusual (to us here in the US who are not Italian) desserts, but it's a wonderful introduction to some parts of Italian cuisine that are grossly and unfairly under-represented in most articles and books on Italian cooking/food. I enjoyed reading this as "just" a book before ever taking it into the kitchen; however, do take it into the kitchen, I certainly did. The lemon cookies I made were delicious, as were the pear ricotta cake and the other four recipes I've made. (The pistachio mousse cake? Oh yeah! Be still, my heart.) In my opinion, this is a cookbook for an adventurous cook because the flavor combinations are not common to American menus. For one thing, there is not much chocolate in here, so if you're one of those people who cannot conceive of a dessert that doesn't involve cocoa beans, you're going to be disappointed unless you can bring yourself to think outside the chocolate box. Fortunately, I don't care much for chocolate, and I love fruit, nuts, and citrus. As for the recipes' skill level, more than half likely will be a challenge for an average cook and possibly frustrating for a beginner cook, at least one short on patience and attention. You aren't going to knock out any of these in half an hour while having one eye on the TV or Angry Birds. These recipes require paying attention to what you're doing. I consider myself a slightly above-average cook, and so I enjoyed the challenge of making something I'd never made before. There are a few recipes I find intimidating, but having had success with the recipes I made, the more challenging ones give me something to look forward to. (If I can get those peach cookies to come out looking anything like the photo, I'll know I've accomplished something impressive.)

If you love baking or sweets, this is a wonderful cookbook, full of delicious and unusual recipes that you probably won't find anywhere else. Beautiful photos of the desserts as well as their origins in Italy make the book a pleasure to browse. I found the descriptions of the base recipes (such as

pastry cream) easy to follow and several of these have already become staples for my baking. The little almond cookies are simple and wonderful. The Eureka cookies and La Deliziosa are two other favorites. With Rosetta's inspiration, I found myself making homemade cannolis (something I never thought I would do) much to the delight of my family. I am looking forward to baking (and eating) my way through the entire book! Thank you, Rosetta!!

Finally, a great cookbook featuring some of my favorite Southern Italian desserts. I was thrilled to find the recipe for Crostata del Diavolo which I recently ate and fell in love with in Calabria. From the easy to make walnut biscotti to the delicious sfogliatelle, there are recipes for cooks of all levels. The book has a gorgeous presentation with mouth watering photographs. There are recipes for all seasons and Persimmons are in the market now so definitely try the Gelato ai Cachi!

I happened to discover Rosetta Costantino's "Southern Italian Desserts" while researching a trip to Southern Italy. Rosetta, a cooking instructor and author of *My Calabria: Rustic Family Cooking from Italy's Undiscovered South*, has collected 75 desserts from Calabria, Campania, Basilicata, Puglia, and Sicily. Sure, you'll find cannoli and gelato here, but there are many other regional gems to discover in each chapter; desserts can vary not only from region to region but from town to town. Sicily offers so much more than cannoli; the divine biscotti Eureka (almond-and-blood-orange-marmalade-filled spirals), chocolate-hazelnut cake rolls, a gorgeous ricotta and pistachio mousse cake named for the 1958 novel *Il Gattopardo*, a baked ricotta tart, and several gelatos and puddings are all on display, including the elaborate watermelon pudding-filled tart on the book's cover. The illustrated primer on making the perfect cannoli (including shells) was very helpful as well; I've only worked with store-bought cannoli shells before, so having a detailed how-to was a lifesaver. Campania's offerings are rich with cherries, pears, and some lovely semolina-enhanced cakes and pastries. One of the more unusual offerings here is the eggplant layered with sweetened ricotta and chocolate sauce. Calabria contributes luscious odes to figs and clever peach-shaped cakes filled with ricotta cream. I fell hard for the chocolate-dipped dried figs filled with almonds and candied orange peel; one of my favorite treats around the holidays are chocolate-dipped figs from Spain, so I loved having the option to make them myself at home. I also fell for the ricotta-filled baked pears; a filling of crushed amaretti, almond paste, and candied orange peel fill ripe pears poached in wine. The elegant ricotta and pear cake was light and refreshing. Other recipes that have become favorites are the biscotti di ceglie (almond cookies with cherry preserves from Puglia). The flavor combination of toasted almonds, a touch of limoncello,

honey and cherry preserves is addictive and fun to make; where else can you continually moisten your hands with limoncello instead of plain water? The barchiglia (chocolate-glazed almond tart with pear preserves) was another great find; the combination of pastry crust, pear marmalade, almond pastry cream, and chocolate is layered with flavor. A final chapter of master recipes provides a handy do-it-yourself guide to ricotta cream, nut pastes, fig and grape syrups, and candied orange peel and orange (or blood orange) marmalade, which is a much-appreciated touch as many of these are not available in regular supermarkets. The cookbook itself is beautiful, printed on high-quality matte paper (my preference, as there is less of an issue with glare when placed in a cookbook holder). Ingredients are listed in volume and metric, and a conversion chart is at the back. The font is easy to read and stands out on the page. Along the way, colorful notes on local ingredients, traditions and legends (including how a local pear variety takes its name from a story involving a statue of St. Anthony) share space with beautiful candid photos of cafes, churches, piazzas, Greek temple columns and inviting alleyways. Many of the recipes have full-page color photos, and the step-by-step photos for more complex recipes like the sfogliatelle ricce was extremely helpful in visualizing the technique described in the recipe. A list of sources, a bibliography, and conversion charts round out the book. "Southern Italian Desserts" is a beautiful (and delicious!) homage to the varied desserts of southern Italy that make the most of seasonal fruits and local ingredients, along with ample holiday sweets and traditions. The many master recipes for items that would otherwise be expensive or hard to find means that anyone is able to recreate authentic Italian desserts at home; whether you're looking for a simple three-ingredient walnut cookie or an elegant layered tart, you're sure to find something that tickles your sweet tooth in "Southern Italian Desserts!" (Review copy courtesy of Rosetta Costantino and publicist - grazie!)

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