

Polpo Grigliato (Grilled Octopus) alla Sergio (Serves 4)

Ingredients

1 Large Octopus (frozen if you cannot get a fresh one) – 1,5kg or more (US 3lbs)
Celery Stick 5cm (US 2in)
1 Whole Peeled Shallot Onion
A bouquet garni of
Cinnamon Stick 3cm (US 1in)
10 Whole Black Peppercorns
3 Whole Cloves
Water

Marinade

100ml (US ½ Cup) of Extra Virgin Olive Oil
2 tsp of Paprika
1 tbsp of roughly chopped flat leafed Parsley
2 Large Cloves of roughly chopped Garlic
½ tsp of Fine Salt
Ground Black Pepper to taste

Dressing (Optional)

50ml (US ¼ Cup) of Extra Virgin Olive Oil
1 Clove of Crushed Garlic

Utensils/Equipment

1 Large Saucepan and lid
Chopping Board
Sharp Knife
Teaspoon (tsp)
Tablespoon (tbsp)
1 Large Plastic High Sided Tray 40cm x 25cm (US 16in x 10in)*
1 Large Metal Tray 40cm x 25 (US 16in x 10in*)
1 Closeable Gridiron 36cm x 35cm 14,5in x 13.5in)*
2 Small Mixing Bowls
1 Colander
Clingfilm/Food Wrap
Basting Brush (Silicon are best)
Metal Spatula
Barbecue and charcoal

*These are just guidance sizes



Method

Preparing your Octopus for the Boiling Stage

Fill a large saucepan with water to about half full, add the bouquet garni, salt, pepper, celery and shallot, and place the saucepan on the stove on a high heat to bring to a rapid boil.

Pick the octopus up by the top of the head so the tentacles are dangling down and carefully submerge all the tentacles into the boiling water to the point where they join the head, but without burning your hand! Hold in the water for only a second or two, lift out and repeat the dipping a further 2 or 3 times and as you do so, the tentacles will curl up. Now gently place the entire octopus in the water, so that it is completely covered. Add more hot water if the octopus isn't fully submerged.

Bring the water back to the boil and then reduce the heat and gently simmer for 25-30 minutes, without the lid on. Now turn off the heat, place the lid on the saucepan and leave it to cool down for about 2 or 3 hours, still in the liquid and ingredients. It doesn't have to go completely cold.



The Marinade and Dressing

Whilst the octopus is cooking/cooling, prepare the marinade by stirring all the ingredients together in a bowl, until blended and set to one side,

If you opt for the garlic dressing, crush or finely chop the garlic cloves and in a small bowl combine with the olive oil and set aside for later.

Getting your cooked Octopus ready for a cold bath and chilling

Once the octopus has cooled, fill a large bowl or a clean sink with cold water and add a load of ice; plunge the octopus in the icy water and leave for 5 or 10 minutes. Drain the octopus completely in a colander and leave until all the water has drained off. Don't dry it with kitchen paper or a towel, as some of the remaining liquid helps in the next stage. Discard the rest of the liquid and other ingredients used in the boil.

Now place the octopus in a flat high sided plastic tray and using sharp scissors, cut off the head just to the top of the body and then cut off each leg to the base of the underside of the body. Cut the head in half and the body into 3 or 4 pieces. Leave the tentacles whole.

Using a basting brush, generously coat each piece of the octopus with the marinade. If there is any marinade left over, just drizzle it over the octopus. Cover the tray with cling film/food wrap and refrigerate for at least 12 hours. The marinade will have a jelly like consistency after being refrigerated, so you will need to remove from the refrigerator about 15 minutes prior to grilling. Once the marinade has liquified, gently turn the octopus pieces to give them another good coating.

Now for the Barbecue!

Whenever we can, we barbecue our octopus over charcoal or wood, as this enhances the flavour with a wonderful smokiness. However, if you don't have access to a barbecue grill or it's too cold or wet to be standing outside, you can achieve a good result by using a cast iron skillet on your stove top.

For the barbecue you'll need a closeable mesh gridiron, as this makes it a lot easier to cook all the octopus in one go and eliminates the risk of losing your precious pieces of octopus through the gaps in your grill.

Place your open gridiron on a metal tray (this is to collect any drips of the marinade) and then evenly place each piece of octopus on the gridiron. Keep some space between each piece, as this will allow the direct heat of the barbecue to caramelize almost all the skin of the octopus pieces. Close the gridiron so that it fits tightly and the pieces are held firmly in place. Keep the metal tray near to your barbecue, as you can use this to put the gridiron and cooked octopus on when it is ready. Do NOT use a plastic tray as the gridiron will be red hot and melt it, leaving you with an octopus tasting of burnt plastic, which would be a disaster.

You will have quite a lot of marinade left in the plastic tray, which is great to use as a baste and helps to keep the octopus from drying whilst being barbecued.

The coals on your barbecue will need to be glowing hot, but without flame and the support rack on the setting nearest to the heat (about 10cm or 4in). Place your gridiron on the rack and give the octopus a basting with the excess marinade.



It's often difficult to judge how fierce the heat is from coals, but surprisingly we've found that octopus doesn't burn very easily, however what you don't want is for it to dry out by grilling it too slowly and for too long. The ultimate goal is to achieve a crispy, caramelised exterior, but the interior to be moist and succulent (the thin ends of the tentacles will be crunchy). This should be achieved after about 5 or 6 minutes grilling on each side, remembering to baste again with the marinade each time you turn it. If it your first time cooking octopus this way, it is probably a good idea to grill for only 3 or 4 minutes on each side and then repeatedly turn it every minute or so, until you see the octopus has caramelised, but not burnt!

Serving and Presentation

Remove the gridiron from the grill and loosen the octopus pieces using a metal spatula, as the pieces sometimes stick a bit to the mesh. Open the gridiron and place the octopus pieces in a serving dish, If you have opted for the dressing, drizzle it over them and give it a quick toss with a spoon so the pieces are evenly coated.

Serve immediately with a green salad and lots of crusty bread to mop up the oil and juices.

(If by chance any octopus is left over, it is great eaten cold. Just chop up what's left into small pieces and a little olive oil and a few drops of very good balsamic vinegar).

Buon appetito!

