



Use your hands to combine the meatball mixture—it's the easiest and most efficient method.



Lunching *al fresco* in Bologna.

## ITALIAN MEATBALLS WITH TOMATO SAUCE

JUST ABOUT EVERY ITALIAN HOME WILL HAVE THEIR OWN FAMILY RECIPE FOR MEATBALLS, OF *POLPETTE*, AS THEY ARE KNOWN. THEY CAN BE SERVED WITH PASTA OR BREAD. THE DISH IS BEST MADE A DAY IN ADVANCE TO LET THE FLAVOURS BLEND TOGETHER.

185 ml ( $\frac{3}{4}$  cup) olive oil  
1 onion, finely chopped  
100 g ( $\frac{2}{3}$  cup) pine nuts, roughly chopped  
3 garlic cloves, crushed  
40 g ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  oz) parsley, roughly chopped  
5 g ( $\frac{1}{8}$  oz) basil or rosemary, roughly chopped  
2 teaspoons fennel seeds, ground  
55 g ( $\frac{2}{3}$  cup) fresh breadcrumbs  
250 g (1 cup) ricotta cheese  
25 g ( $\frac{1}{4}$  cup) grated Parmesan cheese  
grated zest of 1 large lemon  
1 egg  
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) minced (ground) pork or beef

### SAUCE

800 g (1 lb 12 oz) tomatoes or  
2 x 400 g (14 oz) tins tomatoes  
125 ml ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup) red wine

SERVES 4

HEAT half the olive oil in a saucepan and cook the onion and pine nuts until the onion is soft and the pine nuts are light golden brown. Add the garlic and cook for a few minutes more, then set aside to cool.

PUT the herbs, fennel seeds, breadcrumbs, ricotta, Parmesan, lemon zest and egg in a bowl and add the mince. Add the cooled onion and pine nuts, season with salt and pepper and mix briefly until all the ingredients are combined. Test for correct seasoning by frying one small meatball and tasting for flavour. Leave the mixture to rest in the fridge for at least 30 minutes or overnight.

TO MAKE the meatballs, roll about 50 g ( $1\frac{3}{4}$  oz) of mixture into a ball about the size of a walnut and then flatten slightly to make it easier to cook on both sides. Repeat with the rest of the mixture.

HEAT the remaining olive oil in a large saucepan and fry the meatballs until golden brown on both sides. If necessary, cook them in two batches to prevent the pan overcrowding. Make sure there is enough oil to prevent the meatballs sticking to the base of the saucepan. Remove all the meatballs from the pan.

TO MAKE the sauce, if you are using fresh tomatoes, score a cross in the top of each one, plunge them into boiling water for 20 seconds, then drain and peel the skin away from the cross. Finely chop the flesh. Add the tomatoes and wine to the saucepan, season with salt and pepper and simmer for 5 minutes. Gently add the meatballs to the sauce and reduce the heat to a gentle simmer. Cover the saucepan and cook for a further 10 minutes. Leave for 10 minutes before serving.

*instead of breadcrumbs  
I used quinoa flakes.*