

The Power of Anchovies

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by Matthew Card

In my last post, I apparently wrote something controversial in a parenthetical aside: “I have never met a child who doesn’t like anchovies.” Readers contacted me to say that no way would their child *ever* let an anchovy cross their lips. I, of course, disagree.

Let’s take a step back. Sure, kids likely won’t eat them whole, straight from the jar (as my kids do), but they will eat them in myriad ways in which they may not *know* they are eating anchovy. And they’ll like it. Rich in flavor-enhancing glutamates, anchovies add remarkable depth and sweetness to most any savory dish—think of them as MSG minus the headache. Case in point: Caesar Salad. Most every kid likes Caesar salad (or, at the very least, the dressing)—and probably aren’t aware that much of its deep flavor comes from anchovy.

Where else to use them? Add them to beef stews for punch or mix with butter and melt on grilled steaks. Add chopped anchovy—and a spritz of lemon—to roasted broccoli, cauliflower, blanched green beans, or sautéed kale. Melt some into your favorite marinara sauce or add to mashed potatoes along with the butter (and a little minced garlic to guild the lily). And I’ve yet to meet a pizza that doesn’t benefit from the pungent fish.

Perhaps the best way to consume anchovies is in the Piedmontese dip, Bagna Cauda. This dip, which is typically eaten with crudité, is little but equal parts of minced garlic and anchovy slowly melted into butter and extra-virgin olive. Add some herbs if you must and a pinch of chili flake. Eat with sliced fennel, radishes, endive, escarole, baguette, off a spoon.

Consider the strong flavors of anchovy as a “gateway” ingredient. Once kids realize strong, robust flavorings can be delicious, they’ll be willing to try more. Olives, capers, stinky cheese—all reward a bit of culinary courage.

BAGNA CAUDA (Piedmont-style Garlic-and-Anchovy Dip)

Makes about 1 cup

Do not use a garlic press for this, which smashes the garlic rather than slicing it and makes this dish too pungent. To save a little effort, the garlic and anchovies can be minced together. Use the dressing as a dip for crudité, hearty greens, green beans, a spread for toast, scramble egg topping, and, of course, a pasta flavoring. Sage leaves may be combined with or used in place of the rosemary.

- 6 sprigs thyme
- 1 small sprig rosemary
- 12 garlic cloves (about 1 head), minced
- 12 whole oil-packed anchovies, minced
- 2 Bay leaves
- 1 dried small chile (or pinch crushed red pepper flakes)
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

With butcher's twine, tie together thyme and rosemary. Add all ingredients to small saucepan and cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, until garlic and anchovy have mellowed and virtually dissolved into butter-and-oil mixture, 20 to 30 minutes. Remove herb bundle and Bay leaves; store in an airtight container for up to two weeks in the refrigerator.