

Sicilian Style Cheese Caciocavallo all'Argentiera

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According to an old story, a Sicilian silversmith who found himself in financial difficulties created this recipe, which has become a classic. Trying to keep his poverty a secret from his nosy neighbors, he combined caciocavallo, a typical Southern Italian cheese, with seasonings usually associated with meat that he could no longer afford.

The fragrant aroma of the cheese sizzling with the olive oil, garlic, vinegar, and oregano was enough to deceive them into thinking that nothing was amiss. Caciocavallo is typically made from cows' milk. Like mozzarella, it is a stretched curd cheese, but unlike mozzarella it is aged until it is firm and tangy.

The name caciocavallo means "horse cheese" which probably derives from the way the cheese was formed into teardrop shapes that were bound in pairs to a pole and suspended as if over the back of a horse.



Serve the baked cheese with a green salad, crisp Sicilian bread and a bottle of hearty red wine, such as Nero d'Avola. It's ideal as an appetizer or quick meatless meal. In a large heavy skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook until just beginning to turn golden, 1 to 2 minutes.

Place the cheese slices in a single layer on top of the garlic. Raise the heat and add the vinegar. Cook 1 to 2 minutes or until the cheese just begins to melt. With a metal spatula, quickly turn the slices and sprinkle with the oregano. Cook briefly until the cheese is slightly softened and bubbling around the edges. Transfer to a serving dish and serve hot with Sicilian bread.

Serves 4

8 ounces caciocavallo or provolone cheese, cut into 1/2-inch thick slices

1 tablespoon olive oil

2 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced

2 tablespoons white wine vinegar

1/2 teaspoon dried oregano

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