



Giuseppe Federici and His Nonna Marianna Are Redefining Italian Food for Plant-Based Audiences

By Aurelia d'Andrea
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you so much to my incredible photographer @davidloftus, my agent @rachelmillsliterary, my publisher @michaeljbooks @sarahfras1 @danhurst82 and stylist @sticky_toffee_tofu 🙏🙏 Grazie Sepps x

[🎵 original sound – sepps | Giuseppe Federici](#)

When his father was diagnosed with colon cancer nearly a decade ago, Giuseppe Federici did what many of us do when a family member becomes sick: He began researching ways to support his dad's recovery. "Pretty much everything pointed back to how a plant-based diet can help reverse and even prevent these diseases," says Federici, known as Sepps to his fans on social media.

After adopting a plant-based diet and convincing his dad to do the same, London-based Federici—then a university student—began chronicling his personal food journey, posting photos of home-cooked meals alongside brief nutritional analyses. He kept it up as a hobby for five years, slowly building a following, but things ramped up after he posted a video of himself and his Sicilian-born nonna (italian for "grandmother"), Marianna, cooking pasta sauce together.

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first time seeing our book in real life 🙏🙏 Beyond grateful to finally have a copy in our hands after working on this for over a year. It still feels surreal but I'm so excited for it to be out in less than two weeks. To me this isn't just a recipe book, it tells the story of my grandparents who came to the UK from Sicily almost 70 years ago. This book is a celebration of rustic Italian home cooking, plant-based eating, family, and bringing generations together. I simply wouldn't have been able to do this without the support of this online community, so thank you so much. You can order the book via the link in my bio 🙏🙏. Thank

Practically overnight, Federici's audience quadrupled, and he and his nonna began fielding invites to radio shows and morning TV programs, and even landed a meet-and-greet with King Charles and Queen Camilla. Now, two years and more than a million followers later, the duo is celebrating the launch of *Italian Cooking with Nonna*, a colorful, photo-rich cookbook featuring more than 80 vegan versions of Italian classics, many of which spotlight the foods that helped Federici's dad beat cancer: fresh vegetables, whole grains, and plenty of pasta and tomato sauce.

In anticipation of the book's launch, we spoke with Federici about the virtues of eggplant, how to stock your pantry like an Italian, and the one recipe he'd recommend to a vegan newbie. Read the interview, then try Federici's [Pasta con i Broccoli recipe](#) for a taste of the new book!

How did your nonna react when she first tasted your updated renditions of her recipes?

Giuseppe Federici: A lot of the food that my nonna has grown up on is accidentally vegan—things like minestrone, which is just a vegetable soup, and pasta with aubergines (eggplant). So, it wasn't really, "Here's the first time you're ever going to try something vegan," because she's been eating vegan foods for most of her life.

You've included a handy list of pantry staples and fresh foods that make it easy to

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pull together a delicious Italian-inspired meal on the fly. What are some items you recommend that we always keep on hand?

GF: I'm thinking about what nonna is never without: [canned] tomatoes and dried pasta. With tomatoes and pasta, you can make one of the most delicious Italian staple dishes, my nonna's Pasta with Tomato Sauce. It uses simple ingredients that can stay in your cupboard for months and months.



What misconceptions about Italian food have you encountered on your culinary journey?

GF: You have the concept of it being super indulgent and heavily filled with cheese and cream, and there are some aspects to Italian cuisine that involve that, but that's more of the commercialized [contemporary] view of it. [Historically] Italians have had access to [and relied on]—especially lower-income households—“cheap” foods, which are the pulses (legumes), the vegetables, the grains. And so naturally, a lot of Italian food—especially Sicilian food, where my nonna comes from—lends itself very favorably to a plant-based diet.

The majority of the recipes in Italian Cooking with Nonna are centered on seasonal produce, including the often-misunderstood eggplant. What would you say to someone who “doesn’t like eggplant”?

GF: Eggplant—or aubergine, as we call it over here across the pond—is definitely an underrated vegetable. I think the reason people don't like it is because they don't know how to cook it. If you don't do it well, it can turn into this soggy bit of vegetable. But in Italian cooking, there are so many different recipes, and quite a few in the book really do champion eggplant. We've got the eggplant parm, almost like a lasagna, but instead of pasta, you have eggplant coated in breadcrumbs. Once that absorbs the tomato sauce, it's a really nice, almost meaty texture. Try it different ways, because you might not like it in a pasta dish where it's a bit softer, but you might like it when it's nice and crispy.

You mention some Italian-cuisine-specific cooking tools in the book—gnocchi boards and cannoli molds, to name two. What is the one cooking tool or gadget you find indispensable in your everyday cooking?

GF: A mandoline is my favorite gadget in the kitchen. Obviously, it's dangerous if you don't concentrate on what you're doing, but it's a great way to quickly slice anything. What I love to do is put it straight over a pan. I'll mandoline a whole zucchini into a pan in a minute, which is great. You can just use it in so many creative ways.



What one recipe from your book would you steer a newbie vegan or plant-based eater to first?

GF: My Walnut and Mushroom Ragú is a great way to introduce a meat eater into the realm of whole-food plant-based dishes. It's super healthy, high protein, full

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of plant-based fiber and healthy fats, and it's essentially a ragu made of soaked walnuts, chopped and blitzed mushrooms, and soaked sunflower seeds. When you blend it all together with some seasonings into a tomato sauce, it creates a delicious ragu that can be used either with pasta on its own, or I also love to incorporate it into a lasagna.

You mention in your acknowledgements that you've experienced imposter syndrome as a fledgling cookbook author. What words of advice would you offer a burgeoning chef?

GF: Imposter syndrome is definitely something many people face, especially when trying something new or if you get a lot of success in something quite quickly like I have. But I've learned that being a great cook and inspiring people to cook isn't about having particular training, or having a particular background, or having qualifications of being a Michelin star chef, because I have none of those things. It's about passion, curiosity, and the willingness to do better and learn and improve yourself time and time again, and take inspiration from other people. Embrace the journey; give it a go. You don't have to be perfect.