

## Fish and fennel stew with tomatoes and saffron Zuppa di pesce al forno

*A fabulous one-pot meal: all you need is a green salad to serve afterwards. Leftovers freeze very well. There is a certain similarity with the French bouillabaisse – such as the presence of saffron – but this is much easier to make, with only one type of fish.*

*Friselle are individual, round dried breads with a hole in the middle. For centuries, Neapolitan sailors used to take these to sea to enrich stews such as this one.*

¼ teaspoon saffron threads  
750g thick fish fillets, such as snapper, ling or kingfish, cut into 4cm pieces  
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil, plus 2 tablespoons extra, plus enough oil to drizzle  
freshly squeezed juice of ½ lemon  
2 medium red onions, sliced  
1 large fennel bulb, sliced  
3 large cloves garlic, finely chopped  
½ cup coarsely chopped flat-leaf parsley  
1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano  
2 large tomatoes, peeled, seeded and coarsely chopped  
¼ teaspoon chilli flakes (optional)  
250ml (1 cup) dry white wine  
4 friselle or thick slices Italian-type bread, such as *pane di casa* or ciabatta, grilled

Place the saffron in a small bowl and pour over 1 tablespoon hot water. Set aside at least 20 minutes, or until needed.

Place the fish in a dish in one layer. Pour over 1 tablespoon olive oil, squeeze over the lemon juice and season with salt. Turn fish over to coat on both sides and season the other side with salt. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 2 hours or until needed.

Preheat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Combine 2 tablespoons oil, onions and fennel in a large, heavy-based pan which can accommodate the fish later in one layer. Saute over moderate heat until vegetables are soft, about 5-8 minutes. Stir in garlic, parsley and oregano and cook a further 2 minutes. Stir in tomatoes, chilli flakes, if used, wine, reserved saffron and its soaking liquid, and remove the pan from the heat.

Arrange the fish in one layer on top of the other ingredients. Season lightly with salt and pepper. Add enough water to just cover the fish. Drizzle liberally with oil and cover the pot securely. Bake 40 minutes, or until the fish flakes easily when tested with the point of a sharp knife. Check seasoning.

Place friselle in heated, deep plates and ladle the stew over the top. Serve immediately.

Serves 4

