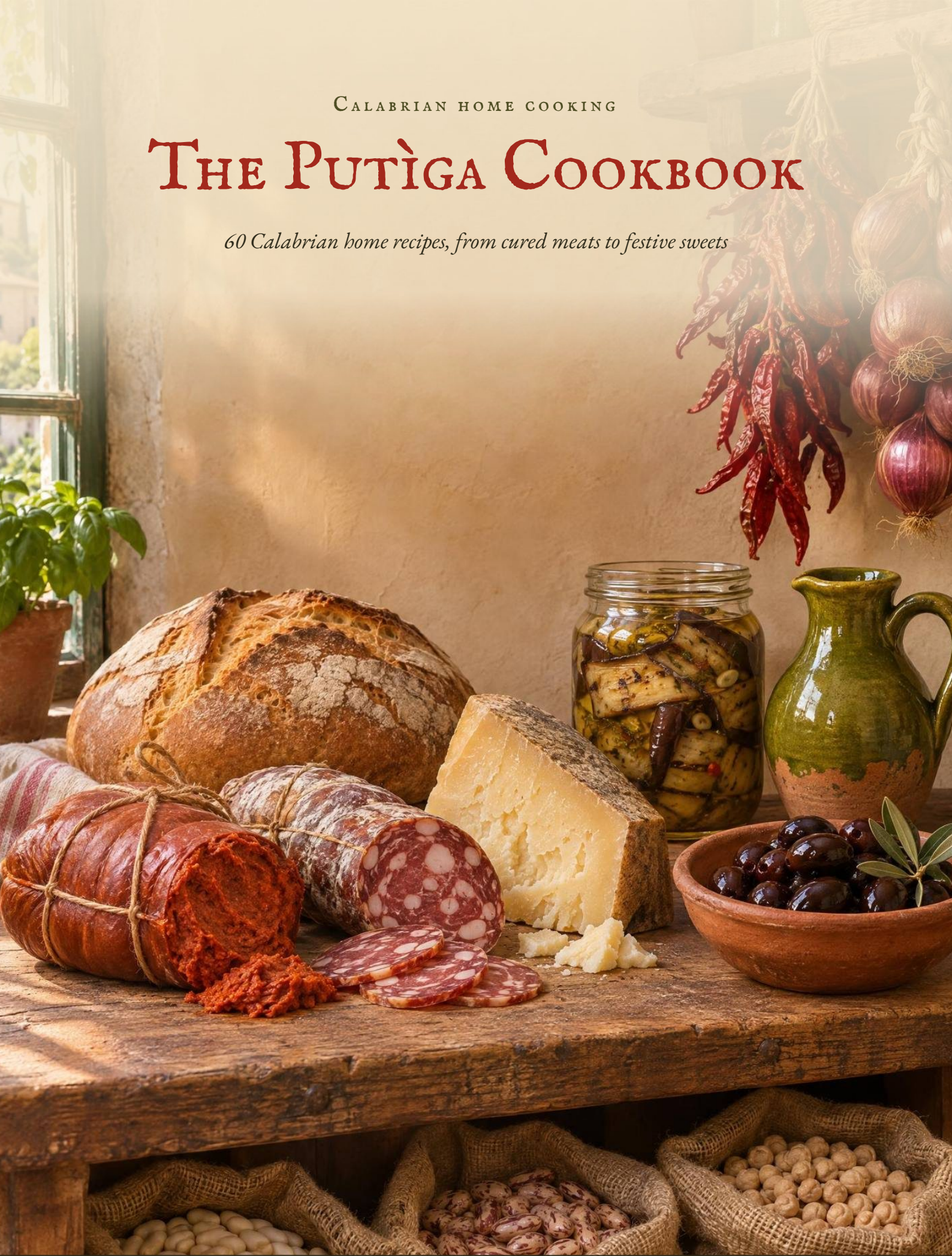
Calabrian home cooking

The Putìga Cookbook

60 Calabrian home recipes, from cured meats to festive sweets



A Putiga - Sapori di Calabria

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Hand-rolled fileja with 'nduja sauce

Fileja fatti a mano con sugo di 'nduja · Vibo Valentia, Monte Poro and Costa degli Dei · all year

Fileja are the pasta of patient hands. All you need is semolina, warm water and a thin metal rod: a rope of dough is wrapped around the rod, stretched under your palms and slides off like a small twisted tube. In the past, instead of the rod, a thin reed called a *dinaciulu* was used. Around Vibo Valentia the favourite sauce is tomato with 'nduja and Tropea red onion, finished with grated pecorino. Your first fileja will come out crooked: that's normal. After twenty or so your hands find the rhythm, and on Sunday you bring to the table a pasta that no shop sells quite the same.

Serves: 4 · **Prep:** 1 hour 15 minutes · **Cook:** 30 minutes · **Rest:** 1 hour · **Total:** 2 hours 45 minutes · **Difficulty:** medium

Ingredients

For the fileja

- 400 g (14 oz) semola rimacinata (re-milled durum wheat semolina), plus a little for the surface
- about 200 ml (¾ cup) warm water, 35-40 °C (95-104 °F)
- 1 pinch salt

For the sauce

- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 medium Tropea red onion, about 100 g (3½ oz)
- 60-80 g (2-3 oz) 'nduja
- 700 g (1.5 lb) tomato passata, or crushed tinned plum tomatoes
- 4-5 basil leaves
- salt, if needed

To finish

- 40 g (1½ oz) grated aged pecorino

Equipment: a fileja rod or a thin, smooth metal rod 2-3 mm (⅛ in) thick and at least 25 cm (9¾ in) long.

Method

The dough

1. Pour the semolina onto the board in a mound with a well in the middle and add the salt.
2. Pour the warm water into the centre a little at a time, mixing with a fork.
3. Knead with your hands for 10-12 minutes, until the dough is smooth, firm and elastic. If it cracks, wet your hands. If it sticks, add a dusting of semolina.
4. Wrap the dough in cling film and leave it to rest for 30 minutes at room temperature.

Shaping

1. Cut off a piece of dough the size of a walnut and keep the rest covered, so it doesn't dry out.
2. Roll the piece under your fingers into a rope as thick as a pencil.
3. Cut the rope into pieces of about 5 cm (2 in).
4. Lay the rod diagonally on one piece and press lightly.
5. Roll the rod back and forth under your open palms, moving your hands outwards. The dough wraps around the rod and stretches to 15-20 cm (6-7¾ in).
6. Slide the fileja off the rod with a firm movement and lay it on a tray dusted with semolina.
7. Repeat with all the dough. Let the fileja dry for 30 minutes, turning them halfway.

The sauce

1. Slice the onion thinly.
2. Heat the oil in a wide pan over medium-low heat and add the onion. Cook it for 6-8 minutes, until soft and translucent, without letting it colour.
3. Add the 'nduja in pieces and crush it with a wooden spoon. After 1-2 minutes the fat melts and the oil turns red.
4. Pour in the passata, stir and bring to a gentle simmer.
5. Cook over low heat for 20 minutes, stirring now and then, until the sauce is thick and the oil rises to the edges. Taste: 'nduja is salty, so add salt only if needed.
6. Turn off the heat and add the torn basil.

Cooking

1. Bring 4 l (4¼ quarts) of water to the boil with 30 g (1 oz) of coarse salt.
2. Add the fileja and cook them for 8-10 minutes. Taste one: it should be tender but still firm in the middle.
3. Drain them, keeping back a cup of cooking water.
4. Tip the fileja into the pan with the sauce and toss for 1 minute over high heat, with a splash of cooking water if the sauce is too thick.
5. Serve straight away with the grated pecorino.







Key steps · illustrative images generated with AI

Tips

- Keep the dough firm: a dough that is too soft sticks to the rod.
- If the fileja won't slide off, dust the rod with semolina every 4-5 pieces.
- You can make the fileja the day before. Let them dry for 2-3 hours and keep them in the fridge on a floured tray, covered with a tea towel.

Common mistakes

- Don't burn the 'nduja: on high heat the chilli turns bitter.
- Don't drown the fileja in sauce: they should be coated, not swimming.
- Don't use soft 00 flour: without semolina the fileja break and overcook.

Local variations

- Instead of 'nduja, a pork or goat ragù.
- With a simple tomato sauce and Pecorino del Monte Poro PDO, for those who don't like heat.

Storage

- Raw fileja: in the fridge for 1 day, or in the freezer for 1 month. Freeze them on a tray, then bag them. Cook them from frozen, adding 2 minutes.
- Sauce: in the fridge for 3 days, in a closed container.

Substitutions

- **Rod:** a thin knitting needle, a smooth metal skewer or a 3 mm (⅛ in) wooden dowel work.
- **'Nduja:** sold in jars in Italian delis. Otherwise, gently fry 60 g (2 oz) very finely chopped spicy salami with 1 teaspoon sweet paprika and ½ teaspoon chilli powder.
- **Tropea onion:** a sweet red onion.

Allergens (14 EU allergens)

Gluten (durum wheat semolina), milk (pecorino).

PDO and PGI

Cipolla Rossa di Tropea Calabria PGI. Optional: **Pecorino del Monte Poro PDO** instead of ordinary aged pecorino.

Wine

A **Cirò Rosso DOC**, which stands up well to the heat of the 'nduja.