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# CookingLight

[« Return to Sardinian Secrets: Foods of the Longest-Lived](#)

## Sardinian Secrets: Foods of the Longest-Lived

In Blue Zones, such as Sardinia, people live to 100 at unusually high rates. Learn what their diets and lifestyles have in common.



Tomato-Poached Eggs with Sardinian Music Bread  
Randy Mayor



### Eat Smarter, Live Longer

You too can adopt the healthiest habits of the longest-lived people on the planet. Here's how.

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#### Sardinian Recipes

[Zucchini with Peppermint \(Curcurica kin Menta\)](#)

[Tomato-Poached Eggs with Sardinian Music Bread \(Ovos kin Tomate e Casu\)](#)

[Risotto-Style Fregula with Mushrooms, Abbamele, and Goat Cheese \(Fregula kin Antunna e Crapinu\)](#)

[Pork Chops with Fava Beans \(Porcu kin Ava Frisca\)](#)

Ef시오 Farris immigrated to America from his native Orosei, Sardinia, more than 20 years ago. When he moved to Dallas and opened his first restaurant, Pomodoro, it was the only Sardinian-influenced restaurant in America at the time. Since then, Farris has made it his mission to bring a bit of the island's lifestyle to American diners.

"People ask me, 'Why did you leave Sardinia?' I tell them I never left—I brought Sardinia with me," he says. At first, when Sardinian ingredients were scarce in this country, Farris traveled home and toted them back in his suitcase. Now he shares the island's food through an import business called Gourmet Sardinia, cooking classes, and a cookbook, *Sweet Myrtle and Bitter Honey*, plus restaurants in Dallas and Houston.

As it happened, he was onto something big. Located off the western coast of Italy, Sardinia is the second largest island in the Mediterranean, boasting nearly 1,100 miles of shoreline and a bounty of wild and cultivated fare. Sardinia's people also live long, making the island what National Geographic has identified as a Blue Zone—one of those rare places in the world (along with Okinawa, Japan; Seventh Day Adventists in Loma Linda, California; and Costa Rica's Nicoya Peninsula) where people often live past 100. It's so common that islanders have an expression in the native dialect, Sardo: A Chent'Annos ("May you live to be 100").

This would have come as no surprise to Farris' grandfather, Manno Nicola, who lived to 107. "My grandfather would say he lived the same way forever," he recalls. That way included specific qualities Sardinia shares with other Blue Zone communities: close family and community relationships, plenty of socializing, nearly constant moderate physical activity, and a largely plant-based diet.

### Many influences

The distinctive flavors of Sardinian cuisine are not just Italian in origin but a hybrid of influences. Starting with the Phoenicians and followed by Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Moors, and Spanish, among others, the island was occupied by nearly every Mediterranean power for more than 2,500 years, until it became part

of Italy in 1861.

This layered culinary heritage is evident in a number of Sardinian foods, such as pasta. While spaghetti is a centuries-old and popular pasta shape from “the continent” (as many Sardinians call Italy), others like fregula (a pasta of Moorish origin that resembles Israeli couscous) and malloreddus (small, chewy dumplings) are unique to the island and not widely known beyond Sardinia.

Conquerors who came by sea drove the people to the island’s interior. “The sea was ugly, nothing but trouble,” Farris explains. “That was where the invaders came from. They kept coming, so my people moved inland, where there were better pastures anyway.” (Blue Zone researchers say that cultural isolation may also have contributed to the islanders’ longevity.) As a result, many of Sardinia’s cherished foods are land-based. “Meat and cheese, pasta and bread, Sardinia is a nation of shepherds,” Farris says. In Sardinia, sheep supposedly outnumber people three to one.

Yet Sardinians didn’t entirely turn their backs on the sea. Islanders gathered shellfish on the coast for traditional dishes like sa fregula (a broth-based, saffron-infused soup with fregula and clams). Fishermen in small boats patrol rivers and the shore for grey mullet. The roe is extracted from the fish, salted, dried, and pressed to form bottarga. Farris’s grandmother made a dish by simply tossing cooked spaghetti with garlic and olive oil, and sprinkling freshly grated bottarga over the top.

Farris prepares the same dish for his family, and sometimes adapts his grandmother’s recipe by adding tomatoes. Another favored Sardinian ingredient, pane carasau (Sardinian music bread), is a thin, twice-baked flatbread. Its name originates from the bread’s resemblance to the ancient parchment on which the island’s sacred music was written. “Every month we’d make enough for the weeks ahead,” Farris says. “In the poorest times, if you had a little bread, you had a lot.” Simple, seasonal fare

The hallmark of Sardinian hospitality is welcoming people to the table, and even in times of scarcity, guests can count on the finest a family has to offer. There’s an expression in Sardo: Sa cucina minore no timet su fuste—“Simple cuisine makes the home great.” The best recipes are rustic, hearty, straightforward preparations.

“Every family grows something,” says Farris. “What one family doesn’t have, another provides. My father gives you eggplants; you give him tomatoes.” Fennel, asparagus, mushrooms, myrtle, and other foods still grow wild, and foraged ingredients find a home in recipes alongside cultivated produce.

That sustainable, interdependent way of life was essential to survival and key to residents’ long lives. It may seem like time stands still on this island, but in fact, it has come full circle. The Sardinian approach to food is the way of the past and the future.

**Jim Eber**

**Printed from:**

<http://www.cookinglight.com/eating-smart/smart-choices/sardinian-foods-0040000041863/>

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