

# Polenta

serves 8–10

Polenta is a versatile component of many menus; it can take center stage or be a lovely accompaniment. It is great in its soft stage with a thick tomato-based sauce or fried meats or shrimp, and it is wonderful when firm, cut, grilled or fried, and served with pesto or a thick ragout, then topped with cheese. It's also great fried for breakfast with butter and maple syrup. Versatile, exciting, and delicious!

**1 c. polenta**  
**3 c. stock of your choice**  
**1/2 tsp. salt**  
**1 T. olive oil**  
**1/4 c. heavy cream**

**1 T. hearty red wine (optional)**  
**1 T. butter**  
**1/2 c. shredded cheese, your favorite that melts well and is not super pungent like jack**  
**2 T. grated parmesan**

Whisk the polenta into the cold or room-temperature stock (I use vegetable) in a medium to large pot. If you're using hot stock, whisk the dry polenta in extra slowly. Place on medium-high heat and stir with a wooden spoon. Add the salt, olive oil, cream, and wine. Stir constantly until it comes to a boil. Turn the heat down to low and adjust the heat to keep the polenta at a low simmer. Stir thoroughly every couple of minutes. As the polenta thickens, it will need to be stirred more frequently. After 20–30 minutes, the polenta should be pulling away from the sides of the pot and be thick, but also creamy in texture. The spoon should be able to stand up readily in the middle of the polenta. Thin with another 1/4–1/2 cup stock if it seems too thick, cook for another 2 minutes, then remove from heat. Add the butter and cheese and stir well.

At this point the polenta is ready to serve in its soft stage. Thin with a little more heavy cream if it is too thick. Spread on a platter and make a well in the center. Pour in your topping of choice (wild mushroom ragout, fried shrimp, chicken, lamb, beef, or a stir-fried vegetable mix; whatever you use should have a bit of juice/sauce/gravy to moisten the polenta). Serve immediately with freshly grated parmesan on top.

For firm polenta, spread it 1/2–3/4" thick in a baking dish or sheet pan. Chill for at least an hour, and up to 24 hours. When firm and set, cut into squares or triangles. Brush with olive oil and fry in a cast iron frying pan or grill on a grill until golden brown. Top with your favorite sauce (wild mushroom ragout, for example), or pesto and mozzarella, or butter and maple syrup. Serve immediately or place in a warm oven until serving time.