

Italian American Heritage Month



In 1989 President George H. W. Bush declared October as National Italian American Heritage Month to celebrate the Italian American culture and heritage.¹ Italian Americans have had much success while carrying on Italian traditions. Since the Revolutionary War, Italian Americans have defended the United States. Italian Americans make up millions of the American population.

The 1990 U.S. Census noted that 15 million Americans had Italian ancestry.² However, it is believed this number is over 26 million due to those who are of mixed heritage. Italian culture is weaved throughout American culture including food, art, and fashion. The Declaration of Independence was signed by two Italian Americans. Between 1880's and 1920's there was a large migration of southern Italian and Sicilian Italians to the United States. It is recorded that as many as 5.4 million Italians came to the United States.³ 1.5 million served during World War II.⁴ Italian Americans are the fifth largest ethnicity in the United States today.⁵ The United States is named after an Italian, Amerigo Vespucci.

Italian American food went mainstream from the 1920's to the 1960's.⁶ Ettore Boiardi became popular and founded Chef Boyardee during this time.

Though thought to have Italian roots, dishes like spaghetti and meatballs, Marinara sauce, Chicken parm, Baked ziti, Garlic bread, and Pizza (as we know it) are American. They are not authentic Italian.

Early Italian immigrants had to adapt to purchasing food as opposed to growing it. They were not familiar with American ingredients or eating habits. Originally Italians had a "veggie-heavy, protein-low diet" which "became meatier, saucier, and, as it only could in America, bigger."

Many Southern Italians came from poor regions, where "meat was scarce and diets consisted mainly of vegetable dishes, grains, and little of what we imagine to be quintessential Italian ingredients. (Cinotto says extra-virgin olive oil wasn't widespread outside coastal areas, and tomatoes were only brought over from the Americas during the age of exploration.) Yet this 19th-century culinary culture bore a new one centered mainly in Little Italy and East Harlem, but also in cities like New Orleans, San Francisco, Boston, and Chicago, with an emphasis on sauce, meat, and colossal portions. Garlic was considered 'a negative thing' and that the children of Italian immigrants stood out in the cafeteria when they pulled out sandwiches on hearty Italian bread. "

Did you know? Located in St. Louis, Fratellanza Society is the oldest Italian American organization.⁷

¹ <http://www.italoamericano.org/story/2015-10-1/italian-heritage>

² <https://www.facebook.com/notes/chris-forte/october-is-national-italian-american-heritage-month/153798704660103/>

³ <http://www.italianfoundation.org/october-is-national-italian-american-heritage-month/>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/notes/chris-forte/october-is-national-italian-american-heritage-month/153798704660103/>

⁵ <http://www.italianfoundation.org/october-is-national-italian-american-heritage-month/>

⁶ <https://firstwefeast.com/features/illustrated-history-of-italian-american-food>

⁷ <http://www.fratellanza.org/>