

## Stracotto di Cucuzza

2-3 Cucuzza (3-4 pounds)  
4 pounds ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and juiced  
1 large chopped onion  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
1/4 cup virgin olive oil  
1/4 cup parsley  
1/4 cup fresh basil, slivered with a scissors  
2 teaspoons fresh chopped rosemary (optional)  
Salt and pepper to taste

Select cucuzza that are firm, unblemished, and have a bit of stem still attached. The stem continues to feed the squash even after cutting. Peel the squash with a vegetable peeler, and slice it in half lengthwise. If the center is seedy, scrape all the seeds out, then cut into bite-sized cubes. In small batches, brown the cubes in the olive oil in a Dutch oven or large pot until just golden. Remove with a slotted spoon and continue with the remainder of the squash.

Dip the tomatoes in boiling water for about 10 seconds and remove. Cut out the cores and slip off the peels. Cut the tomatoes in half. Gently squeeze out the juice and seeds into a sieve placed over a bowl.

Save the sieved juice in case you need it to moisten the stew. Coarsely chop the tomatoes.

Sauté the chopped onion in the remaining olive oil until golden, adding more olive oil if necessary. When the onion is nearly golden, add the minced garlic and cook for 2 minutes, stirring. Do not let the garlic brown. Add the chopped tomato pulp, stirring until it begins to disintegrate. Add the cucuzza, the herbs, salt and pepper to taste. Simmer for 30-45 minutes, until the ingredients are blended and the stew has a good consistency. If it is too dry, add the reserved tomato juice.

Serve with more fresh chopped basil on top, either as a side dish or over pasta, rice, or polenta.