Main dishes / Italy

Isicia Omentata

Rome's answer to the burger, lifted straight from Apicius: minced beef pounded with pepper and pine nuts, soused with salty garum and a splash of wine, then wrapped in lacy caul fat that bastes the patty as it sears into a crisp, savoury shell. Smoky, funky, and unmistakably ancient.

Time 45 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 parts Beef mince (chuck, 20% fat, coarse-ground)
- ☐ 6 parts Dry white wine (Roman passum if you have it)
- ☐ 8 parts Toasted pine nuts (lightly crushed)
- ☐ 10 parts Stale bread soaked in wine (squeezed dry)
- ☐ 4 parts Olive oil (for the pan)
- ☐ 8 parts Garum / liquamen (fermented fish sauce)
- ☐ 1.5 parts Black peppercorns (freshly cracked)
- ☐ 1 parts Cumin & lovage seed (ground)
- ☐ 15 parts Caul fat (omentum, rinsed)

Let's make it.

01 In a dry pan over medium heat, toast the pine nuts until they turn pale gold and smell nutty, 2-3 minutes, shaking constantly. Tip them out, then briefly warm the cracked pepper, cumin and lovage seed in the residual heat just until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Crush the cooled pine nuts coarsely so they keep some bite.

02 In a wide bowl, combine the beef mince with the toasted pine nuts and spices, the wine-soaked bread, garum and wine. Work the mixture with your hands for about a minute until the garum is evenly distributed and the meat just begins to feel tacky and cohesive. Do not overwork it into a paste — you want a tender, open crumb, not a dense sausage.

03 Divide the forcemeat into 4-6 portions and shape each into a plump patty about 2 cm thick. Lay a piece of caul fat flat, set a patty in the centre, and fold the lacy membrane snugly around it, trimming any excess so it overlaps once on the underside. The caul will melt as it cooks, basting and crisping the surface.

04 Heat the olive oil in a heavy pan over medium-high heat until it shimmers. Lay the patties seam-side down and sear undisturbed for 3-4 minutes until a deep crust forms, then flip and cook the second side 3-4 minutes more, until the caul has rendered and crisped and the centre reaches a juicy 60-63°C / 140-145°F. Rest 5 minutes before serving with extra garum on the side.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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