Main dishes / Italy

Polenta

Coarse cornmeal stirred into a slow whirlpool until the grains burst, swell, and pull away from the pot in a single glossy mass — patient, golden, and finished with a knot of butter and a storm of cheese.

Time 50 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 500 parts Water (or half water, half milk)
- ☐ 100 parts Stone-ground coarse cornmeal (polenta)
- ☐ 2 parts Fine sea salt
- ☐ 12 parts Unsalted butter
- ☐ 15 parts Parmigiano-Reggiano (finely grated)
- ☐ 30 parts Whole milk (to finish, optional)

Let's make it.

01 Pour the water into a heavy-bottomed pot — copper or thick-clad steel holds heat best and resists scorching. Add the salt and bring to a bare simmer over medium heat. The water should be hot and lazily steaming, with small bubbles trembling at the edges, NOT at a rolling boil. A violent boil flings cornmeal everywhere and seizes it into lumps.

02 Stir the simmering water into a slow whirlpool with a whisk. While it spins, add the cornmeal in a thin, steady rain from your fist — never dump it. Whisk constantly as you pour so each grain disperses before the next lands. Once all the cornmeal is in, switch to a sturdy wooden spoon. The mixture will look loose and milky, like thin cream.

03 Drop the heat to its lowest setting so the polenta blips rather than boils — a thick bubble should heave up and burst every few seconds, like a slow mud pot. Cook 35-45 minutes, stirring every few minutes with the wooden spoon, scraping the bottom and corners to prevent scorching. The polenta is done when the grains have lost all grittiness and the mass pulls cleanly away from the sides of the pot as you stir.

04 Off the heat, beat in the cold butter and grated Parmigiano, stirring vigorously until both melt into a glossy, unified cream. For a soft, spoonable polenta, loosen with the warm milk until it slumps slowly off the spoon. Taste and adjust salt. Serve at once in warm, shallow bowls — polenta stiffens fast as it cools.

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