

Ciceri e tria

Grains and pulses make a classic combination, one found all over the world, from rice and beans in Latin America to millet and peanut sauce in West Africa. No doubt these various pairings have evolved over the millennia due to their satisfyingly savoury flavours, their high nutritional value (the combination can cover all amino acid bases, in place of meat) and their ability to fill up the whole family at a low price.



The traditional Puglian fare of ciceri e tria is one of these dishes – a wholesome mix of earthy chickpeas and wholemeal pasta strips. ‘Ciceri’ are an old Puglian variety of chickpea, slightly and smaller and tastier than the regular ones. ‘Tria’ is an old word for pasta, coming from the Arabic word ‘ittriya’. Comparable dishes are found all over Italy, such as the pasta e fagioli from Emilia in the north. But ciceri e tria, also known as cece e ttria, cicerittria or similar, is particularly intriguing due to its mysterious ancient origins, which link in to the whole debate over the origins of pasta itself. One clue might lie in the fact that some of the pasta, unusually, is fried, while the rest is boiled.

We had a wonderful bowl of ciceri e tria at Anna Carmela’s fantastic trattoria ‘Le Zie’ in Lecce soon after we’d arrived off the boat from [Greece](#) on our culinary road trip of Europe in 2008. It was the perfect introduction to our [Italian food investigations](#), raising all sorts of questions about continuity and change in Puglia, its regional distinction from the rest of the Italian peninsula and links to the medieval Arab world. We didn’t even realise then that we’d be musing on ciceri e tria again four months later in [Morocco](#) when we found a strikingly similar dish there called ‘trid’...

Serves: 4

Total active time: 1½ hours (NB you need to start a day ahead)

for the chickpeas:

- 250g (1 mug-full) dried chickpeas
- 1 carrot, peeled and halved cross-wise
- 1 onion, peeled and halved vertically through the root
- 3 sticks celery, halved cross-wise
- 1 leek, white and pale green part only
- 2 fat garlic cloves, peeled
- 2 sprigs parsley
- 2 sprigs thyme
- 2 tsps salt
- 2 generous slugs olive oil



for the pasta:

350g (2 mug-fulls) hard wholewheat flour semolina (*'semola di grano duro integrale'*)

1 tsp salt (c.5g)

approx 240ml (1 cup) warm water

more semolina for rolling and cutting pasta

olive oil for frying

to garnish:

extra virgin olive oil

freshly cracked black pepper

chilli flakes (optional)



1. *Soak chickpeas:* Place chickpeas in a container, cover with water by at least three times their volume, cover and leave in the fridge for 24 hours.
2. *Cook chickpeas:* Drain and rinse chickpeas. Place in a large saucepan and cover with fresh cold water by a good inch. Add all other ingredients for the chickpeas, cover and simmer gently over a low flame until cooked. NB When to add the salt when cooking dried pulses is a much debated question... If you add it early, they will be seasoned better and taste better, but probably take longer to cook. If you add it late on in the cooking, they will be less flavourful but probably take less time to cook. Allow anything from 40 mins to 4 hours for the chickpeas to cook. They need to be totally tender, with creamy insides. If the water level reduces, keep it topped up so that the chickpeas remain well covered at all times. You can do this step in advance if you like, leaving the chickpeas in their liquid in the fridge overnight and then reheating.
3. *Make pasta dough:* Mix flour, salt and water until well combined into a smooth dough. Do not add all the water at once; start with 200ml and add more as and if needed to form a firm but workable dough. Knead for 5 minutes, then wrap in clingfilm and let rest in the fridge for half an hour. This step can also be done a day in advance.
4. *Roll pasta:* Remove dough from fridge and knead for a couple of minutes. Divide into three portions and form each into a flattened rectangular block. Wrap two in clingfilm and pass the other through the widest setting of your pasta roller (usually '1'). Fold the length like a business letter such that it is as wide as the pasta machine. After folding seal it by stamping down all over with the heel of your palm, then feed one of the open ends into the machine first (so as to squeeze out air bubbles) to roll it again. Repeat folding and rolling several times until pasta is smooth and supple. At first it may be very raggedy and probably tear. Don't worry, fold the dough over itself and keep passing it through the machine; it will come good. When ready, pass the length through the machine once on each setting, without folding, until the third-to-thinnest setting ('4' on most machines). This pasta should be on the thick side. NB While working the pasta through the machine you may find it helps to occasionally give it a light dusting of flour to prevent it sticking to the machine or work surface.
5. *Cut pasta:* Now fold the length over itself twice so that it is $\frac{1}{4}$ of its original length, dusting well between each layer with more flour. Trim round the edges of the pile to create a neat rectangle of four layers of pasta. Now cut pasta into fat tagliatelle, about $\frac{3}{4}$ " wide. Shake them up to separate and remove excess flour, then lay out on a tea-towel. Repeat with remaining two portions of dough. You should end up with 2 or 3 tea-towels of pasta strips. Leave for around half an hour to partially dry.
6. *Finish chickpeas:* Meanwhile drain chickpeas, reserving their liquid. Pick out largest remaining pieces of vegetable and herb and discard. Take approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of chickpeas and mash them in a saucepan

(using a potato masher or fork) with some of the liquid to make a very loose slurry. Mix in whole chickpeas, taste and season as needed, then keep warm while you cook the pasta.

7. *Fry some pasta:* Heat oil (approx ½” deep) in a wide sauté pan until a piece of pasta sizzles vigorously immediately it is added. Fry approximately ¼ of the pasta, in batches, until golden brown and crispy on both sides. You can fold them over themselves as you add them to the oil to create attractive ribbon-like shapes if you wish. Remove with a slotted spoon to kitchen paper to drain.
8. *Boil remaining pasta:* Bring some salted water to a rolling boil, then add pasta and cook until *al dente*, probably only a couple of minutes. Drain and let sit in the colander for a minute as steam evaporates away. (Traditionally, the pasta for this dish would be boiled in the reserved chickpea liquid. But I find you gain more flavour by retaining the concentrated liquid for adding to the dish at the end rather than diluting it up to a volume large enough to boil the pasta.)
9. *Assemble:* Gently mix chickpeas, boiled pasta and half the fried pasta. Add some reserved chickpea liquid to moisten the mix. It should be quite moist, but not soupy. Serve with remaining fried pasta on top, with a good drizzle of extra virgin olive oil, black pepper and chilli flakes if desired to garnish.

