

Panzanella Romana

A no-cook Roman summer classic — stale bread, ripe tomatoes, fresh basil. Simple, perfect, and better every time you make it.

Ingredients

- 11 oz stale country bread or Roman rosette rolls
- 4 ripe tomatoes (ramati or costoluti)
- 1 red onion or spring onion
- 10 fresh basil leaves
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp white or red wine vinegar
- 7/8 cup water (for soaking)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 cucumber, thinly sliced (optional)
- 1 pinch dried oregano (optional)

Steps

1. Tear or cut 11 oz stale country bread or Roman rosette rolls into chunks. Mix 7/8 cup water (for soaking) with a splash of the 2 tbsp white or red wine vinegar and soak the bread pieces until softened. Gently squeeze out the excess liquid with your hands — the bread should be moist but not waterlogged.
2. Thinly slice 1 red onion or spring onion. If the flavour seems sharp, soak the slices for 10 minutes in cold water with a pinch of 1 tsp salt, then drain. This softens the bite considerably.
3. Cut 4 ripe tomatoes (ramati or costoluti) into rough chunks over a bowl — keep the juice. Add the drained onion and, if using, 1/2 cucumber, thinly sliced (optional).
4. Add the squeezed bread to the vegetables. Dress generously with 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, the remaining 2 tbsp white or red wine vinegar, and 1 tsp salt. Tear 10 fresh

basil leaves by hand directly over the bowl — never cut basil, it oxidises. Add 1 pinch dried oregano (optional) if using. Toss everything together.

5. Leave at room temperature for 10–15 minutes before serving. This is not optional — it's when the bread drinks in all the flavours and the dish becomes itself.

Notes

The bread matters. Real stale pane casereccio or Roman rosette is what gives panzanella its texture — soft inside, slightly chewy, thirsty for tomato juice. Supermarket sandwich bread will turn to mush. If your tomatoes are very ripe and juicy, you may need less vinegar. Taste as you go. Do not refrigerate — cold kills it.