

Get Stuffed

by Robin Barr Sussman • Illustration by Chris Hsu

Autumn leaves and cooler breezes ignite the appetite for heartier fare like luscious stuffed pastas, made from scratch. Whether you have a soft spot for ravioli, tortellini or agnolotti, here are six pasta pockets to try before you die.

AMALFI

6100 Westheimer, 713-532-2201
Agnolotti con provola. These fluffy hand-made pillows filled with smoked buffalo mozzarella and ricotta cheese are so divine, you'll want to sleep on them. It's the smoked mozzarella that makes the filling sing. The rich butter sage sauce and bright heirloom tomato reduction is equally addicting, and the intricate plating is gorgeous.

PRICE: \$21

SCORE: 10

GIACOMO'S

3215 Westheimer, 713-522-1934
Tortelli di bietola. House-made mezzaluna ravioli are tangy and creamy stuffed with Swiss chard, ricotta and goat cheese, with sage butter sauce the crowning glory. Meatier is the tortellini stuffed with chicken, pork, mortadella and Parmigiano Reggiano served with parmesan cream sauce, tomato or tomato cream sauce.

PRICE: \$14/\$8 HALF ORDER

SCORE: 10

IL MASCALZONE

1500 Shepherd, 713-862-9700, and other location
Ravioli Aurora. The made-from-scratch pasta sauces and flavor-infused olive oils here are good enough to drink. The spinach-and-ricotta-stuffed cheese ravioli are deliciously lavished with mixed wild mushrooms, fresh tomato sauce and pecorino cheese. However, the ravioli were quite small with little filling, and the pasta was a bit stiff. Same goes for the veal-stuffed agnolotti in butter-sage sauce.

PRICE: \$18

SCORE: 8

NORTH ITALIA

1700 Post Oak Blvd., #190, BLVD Place II, 281-605-4030
Spinach tortellini. Through the glass kitchen, watch the chefs make the spinach pasta dough, roll it out, punch cut the tortellini, stuff and hand-wrap it. This painstaking process ensures fresh and fluffy dough. The puffy morsels, stuffed with four cheeses, including

mascarpone, melt in your mouth. Toppings of garlicky spinach and roasted mushrooms are sublime and magically create a natural sauce.

PRICE: \$16

SCORE: 10

VALLONE'S

947 Gessner, Memorial Gateway Mall, 713-395-6100

Chianti-braised short rib tortellini. Even though this is a steakhouse, Italian emperor Tony Vallone would never leave pasta off the menu. These giant house-made tortellini are stuffed with tender short rib meat that has absorbed the flavor of Chianti wine. To take it over the top, the pasta is blanketed in heady cognac sauce and dotted with whole roasted walnuts. Robust, celebratory fare and a great price.

PRICE \$16

SCORE: 10

WEIGHTS & MEASURES

2808 Caroline, 713-654-1970

Duck ravioli. The unexpected combination of rich duck confit ravioli topped with beet greens pesto and napped in nutmeg-spiced parsnip cream absolutely bellows, "Autumn!" Together the flavors were lush, tangy and peppery all at once. Only negative: The ravioli shells were slightly undercooked.

PRICE \$21

SCORE: 9



Robin Barr Sussman is a freelance food writer with a culinary mission: great taste.