

Eat Your Vegetables at Giacomo's

Giacomo's Cibo e Vino offers pleasures beyond pasta.

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Image: [Katharine Shilcutt](#)

Rapini, foreground, to complement an order of polpetti di manzo (hand-formed meatballs) in a tomato cream sauce.

There are a handful of restaurants in my standard rotation that I'd eat at on a daily basis if my waistline or wallet permitted: Roost, Pondicheri, Cafe TH, and Giacomo's Cibo e Vino. They're my go-to places where a good (but usually great) meal is guaranteed, where the pretense is nonexistent and the where the atmosphere is as inviting as your own dining room at home.

Giacomo's Cibo e Vino
3215 Westheimer
713-522-1934

But even though Giacomo's Cibo e Vino is known for owner/chef Lynette Hawkins's house-made pasta, that's not why I find myself there most frequently. It's for the vegetables.

Like an Italian version of a tapas restaurant, Giacomo's encourages you to order a cluster of small plates among your table and split them all. This way I can sate my pasta craving—a few bites of *tortelli di bietola*, the overstuffed pockets spilling over with Swiss chard, ricotta, and goat cheese; a snagged forkful of the intensely rich spaghetti *alla carbonara* studded with crispy guanciale and coated with slippery egg yolk—while indulging primarily in Giacomo's excellent but often overlooked vegetable dishes.



Tortellini al sugo rosa for "dessert."

My two favorites in the current rotation are the spicy rapini and the roasted brussels sprouts. Sautéed with garlic, anchovies, and olive oil, each thick leaf of the rapini has been rendered soft and luxurious. A vague undercurrent of the cruciferous vegetable's natural bitterness remains, giving it a small additional bite that matches the garlicky heat.

The brussels sprouts are given an even simpler treatment, sliced in half and tossed in olive oil before being browned to a nutty crisp. No unnecessary cream sauce here, nor anything else that would mask the sprouts themselves. Nothing but that sweet, cabbage-y funk I crave under the warm, alluring layers of barely caramelized leaves.

A torta di cipolle e caprino (savory goat cheese and onion tart that resembles a quiche) comes with an excellent arugula salad topped with marinated eggplant and red peppers.

As with another Italian tapas-style favorite—Vinoteca Poscol—this is a place where I'll often take picky eaters and introduce them to the simple joys of well-prepared vegetables. It doesn't hurt that there's the promise of *cavatappi ai cinque formaggi*—Giacomi's version of macaroni and cheese with a five-cheese cream sauce—



there to back those vegetables up as incentive, of course.

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