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## **PASTA**

When serving a sit-down dinner, a pound of pasta will serve 4 as an entree or 6 as an appetizer.

For a buffet, a pound of pasta will serve 8-12, since people are likely to fill their plates with all of the other food.

Make entertaining hassle-free by setting the table way ahead of time - it will clear out some kitchen clutter and you won't be rushing right before the guests arrive.

Consider setting up a spread of antipasti for your guests to keep them nibbling while you finish any last-minute cooking.

Try making a larger, family-size pasta dish (like lasagna or mac & cheese) a day ahead and reheat it before the party starts. It will save time on game-day, so you can relax with your guests or even entertain on a weeknight.

## **PASTA**

**Definition:** [PAH-stuh] Though many pundits claim that Marco Polo brought the idea of noodles back with him to Italy from China, the truth is that this food form existed in both places independently long before Polo's expeditions. In fact, archaeological documentation now points to the fact that noodles probably originated in central Asia, possibly dating back to at least 1000 b.c. Almost every country has a form of pasta. The Germans enjoy spaetzle, Poles have their pierogi and throughout the Orient there are dozens of noodles, usually made with rice or soy flour rather than wheat flour (see asian noodles). In Italian, the word *pasta* means "paste," and refers to the dough made by combining durum wheat flour called semolina with a liquid, usually water or milk. The term "pasta" is used broadly and generically to describe a wide variety of noodles made from this type of dough. Some doughs have a little egg added, though doughs made with only flour and eggs are generally referred to as noodles. There are hundreds of shapes, sizes, thicknesses and colors of pasta. macaroni and spaghetti are probably the most popular, though each of those categories has many size and shape varieties. Additionally, there are dozens of fancy shapes such as conchiglie (shells), farfalle (bows) and rotelle (little corkscrews). Other pastas, such as ravioli and tortellini, have fillings. Some pastas are colored, often with spinach (green), beet juice or tomato paste (red) and squid ink (charcoal

gray). Pasta also comes in both dried and fresh forms. As a general rule, imported dried pasta is superior to American factory-made products, mainly because the imported pasta is only made with semolina, which doesn't absorb too much water and is pleasantly firm when cooked al dente. A good selection of dried pastas can be found in most supermarkets, and an even broader variety is available in Italian markets. It should be stored airtight in a cool, dry place and can be kept almost indefinitely. Fresh pasta is often made with eggs instead of water; it can increasingly be found in many supermarkets and is always available in Italian markets. Because it's highly perishable, it must be refrigerated airtight and can be stored in this manner for about 4 days. It can also be frozen for up to a month. Fresh pastas cook in a fraction of the time necessary for dried pastas. When it comes to saucing pasta, a general rule is to use light sauces for delicate pastas like capelli d'angelo and chunky, heavy sauces for sturdy pastas such as fusilli. See also acini di pepe; agnolotti; anelli; bavettine; bucatini; cannaroni; cannelloni; capellini; cappelletti; cavatappi; cavatelli; coralli; creste di galli; ditali; elbow pasta; fedelini; fettucce; fettuccine; fideos; fischietti; gemelli; gnocchi; lasagna; linguine; lumache; maccheroni; mafalda; magliette; manicotti; margherite; mostaccioli; orecchiette; orzo; pansotti; pappardelle; pastina; penne; perciatelli; pezzoccheri; quadrettini; radiatore; rigatoni; riso; rotini; semi de melone; stelle; tagliarini; tagliatelle; tagliolini; trenette; tripolini; tubetti; vermicelli; ziti.

## Angel Hair Pasta with Pesto

Leaves from 2 bunch fresh basil

2 tablespoons pine nuts, untoasted

1 garlic clove

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 pound angel hair pasta

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil for the pasta. Combine the basil, pine nuts, garlic, and olive oil in a blender and blend to a puree. Add the cheese, salt and pepper, and blend again.

Cook the pasta in the boiling, salted water until al dente, about 3 minutes. Drain and transfer to a large bowl. Add the pesto and toss. Taste for salt and pepper, and add a drizzle of oil, if you like.

## Butternut Squash Lasagna



**Cook's Note:** The no-boil lasagna noodles can be substituted with fresh spinach lasagna sheets. Look for fresh lasagna sheets in the refrigerated section of specialty markets.

**1 tablespoon olive oil**

**1 (1 1/2 to 2-pound) butternut squash, peeled, seeded, and cut into 1-inch cubes**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**1/2 cup water**

**3 amaretti cookies, crumbled**

**1/4 cup butter**

**1/4 cup all-purpose flour**

**3 1/2 cups whole milk**

**Pinch nutmeg**

**3/4 cup (lightly packed) fresh basil leaves**

**12 no-boil lasagna noodles**

**2 1/2 cups shredded whole-milk mozzarella cheese**

**1/3 cup grated Parmesan**

**Heat the oil in a heavy large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the squash and toss to coat. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Pour the water into the skillet and then cover and simmer over medium heat until the squash is tender, stirring occasionally, about 20 minutes. Cool slightly and then transfer the squash to a food processor. Add the amaretti cookies and blend until smooth. Season the squash puree, to taste, with more salt and pepper.**

**Melt the butter in a heavy medium-size saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour and whisk for 1 minute. Gradually whisk in the milk. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to medium and simmer until the sauce thickens slightly, whisking often, about 5 minutes. Whisk in the nutmeg. Cool slightly.**

**Transfer half of the sauce to a blender\*. Add the basil and blend until smooth. Return the basil sauce to the sauce in the pan and stir to blend. Season the sauce with salt and pepper, to taste.**

**Position the rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 375 degrees F.**

Lightly butter a 13 by 9 by 2-inch glass baking dish. Spread 3/4 cup of the sauce over the prepared baking dish. Arrange 3 lasagna noodles on the bottom of the pan. Spread 1/3 of the squash puree over the noodles. Sprinkle with 1/2 cup of mozzarella cheese. Drizzle 1/2 cup of sauce over the noodles. Repeat layering 3 more times.

Tightly cover the baking dish with foil and bake the lasagna for 40 minutes. Sprinkle the remaining mozzarella and Parmesan cheeses over the lasagna. Continue baking uncovered until the sauce bubbles and the top is golden, 15 minutes longer. Let the lasagna stand for 15 minutes before serving.

**\*When blending hot liquids:** Remove liquid from the heat and allow to cool for at least 5 minutes. Transfer liquid to a blender or food processor and fill it no more than halfway. If using a blender, release one corner of the lid. This prevents the vacuum effect that creates heat explosions. Place a towel over the top of the machine, pulse a few times then process on high speed until smooth.

### **Kicked Up Pasta with Four Cheeses**



1 pound penne, ziti or other tubular pasta

1 tablespoon olive oil

6 ounces pancetta, diced

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 tablespoons minced garlic

1/4 cup white wine

1 cup heavy cream

1 1/4 cups grated Grana Padana, or Parmigiano-Reggiano

1 cup crumbled Dolce Gorgonzola, Gorgonzola, or other creamy, mild blue cheese

3/4 cup grated fontina

1/2 cup grated Pecorino Toscana, or Pecorino Romano

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Minced parsley, garnish

In a large pot of boiling salted water, cook the pasta until al dente. Drain and return to the pot. Toss with the olive oil and stir to prevent from sticking.

Meanwhile, in a large sauté pan, cook the pancetta until the fat is rendered and browned. Remove and drain on paper towels. Melt the butter in the pan over medium heat. Add the garlic, and cook, stirring, until soft and fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the wine, increase the heat, and stir to deglaze the pan. Cook until reduced to 1 tablespoon. Add the cream and cook until reduced slightly, about 2 minutes. Lower the heat and add the cheeses 1 at a time, stirring after each addition. Cook, stirring, until melted and smooth. Adjust the seasoning, to taste, with salt and pepper. Add the pasta and toss to coat evenly. Stir in the pancetta. Transfer to a hollowed cheese wheel or large serving bowl. Top with freshly ground black pepper and parsley. Serve immediately.

## Lasagna

2 cups fresh ricotta

8 ounces grated Provolone

8 ounces grated Mozzarella

8 ounces grated Romano

1 egg

1/4 cup milk

1 tablespoon chiffonade of fresh basil

1 tablespoon chopped garlic

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1 recipe of Emeril's Meat Sauce, recipe follows

1/2 pound grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

1 package of dried lasagna noodles

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

In a mixing bowl, combine the ricotta, Provolone, Mozzarella, Romano, egg, milk, basil and garlic. Mix well. Season with salt and pepper. To assemble, spread 2 1/2 cups of the meat sauce on the bottom of a deep dish lasagna pan. Sprinkle 1/4 of the grated cheese over the sauce. Cover the cheese with 1/4 of the dried noodles. Spread a 1/4 of the cheese filling evenly over the noodles. Repeat the above process with the remaining ingredients, topping the lasagna with the remaining sauce. Place in the oven and bake until bubbly and golden, about 45 minutes to 1 hour. Remove from the oven and cool for 10 minutes before serving. Slice and serve.

## **Meat Sauce:**

2 tablespoons olive oil

1/3 pound ground beef

1/3 pound ground veal

1/3 pound ground pork

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

2 cups finely chopped onions

1/2 cup finely chopped celery

1/2 cup finely chopped carrot

2 tablespoons chopped garlic

2 (28-ounce) can of peeled, seeded and chopped tomatoes

1 small can tomato paste

4 cups beef stock or water

2 sprigs of fresh thyme

2 bay leaves

2 teaspoons dried oregano

2 teaspoons dried basil

Pinch of crushed red pepper

2 ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano

In a large nonreactive saucepan, over medium heat, add the oil. In a mixing bowl, combine the meat. Season with salt and pepper and mix well. When the oil is hot, add the meat and brown for 4 to 6 minutes. Add the onions, celery, and carrots. Season with salt and pepper. Cook for 4 to 5 minutes or until the vegetables are soft. Add the garlic and tomatoes. Season with salt and pepper. Continue to cook for 2 to 3 minutes. Whisk the tomato paste with the stock and add to the tomatoes. Add the thyme, bay leaves, oregano, basil and red pepper. Mix well. Bring the liquid to a boil, reduce the heat to medium and simmer for about 2 hours. Stir occasionally and add more liquid if needed. During the last 30 minutes or cooking, reseason with salt and pepper and stir in the cheese. Remove from the heat and let sit for 15 minutes before serving.

## **Italian Egg and Pasta Scramble**

1/2 cup orzo pasta  
10 large eggs  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
2 ounces smoked mozzarella, cut into 1/2-inch cubes  
2 tablespoons thinly sliced fresh basil leaves  
1 tablespoon butter  
4 ounces pancetta, coarsely chopped  
1/2 cup chopped onion  
8 thin asparagus stalks, trimmed, cut crosswise into 1/2-inch pieces

Bring a large saucepan of salted water to a boil. Add the orzo and cook until al dente, stirring occasionally, about 5 minutes. Drain the orzo.

Whisk the eggs, salt, and pepper in a medium bowl to blend. Stir in the cheese and basil. Set aside. Melt the butter in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add the pancetta and saute until crisp and golden, about 5 minutes. Add the onion and saute until tender, about 2 minutes. Add the asparagus and saute until crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. Add the orzo and stir to coat. Add the egg mixture. Using a rubber spatula, stir the mixture until the eggs are softly set, about 4 minutes. Transfer the egg mixture to a serving bowl and serve.

## **Lasagna Bolognese**

7 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus more for the pan  
1 shallot, chopped  
1/2 small carrot, chopped  
1/2 celery stalk, chopped  
1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour  
6 cups whole milk  
3 sprigs flat leaf parsley  
1 sprig fresh thyme  
1/2 dry bay leaf

**1/2 teaspoon kosher salt plus more to taste**

**Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**1 pound dry lasagna noodles**

**5 1/2 cups Meat and Tomato Sauce, recipe follows**

**1 cup freshly grated Parmesan, or half Pecorino and Parmesan**

**In a large saucepan, melt 6 tablespoons of the butter over medium heat. Add the shallot, carrot, and celery, and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Sift the flour over the vegetables, and cook the mixture, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon until it lightens in color, about 2 minutes. Slowly whisk in the milk and bring to a boil. Add the parsley, thyme, and bay leaf. Reduce the heat to low, and simmer, whisking occasionally, until the sauce is thickened, about 30 minutes. Strain and season with 1/2 teaspoon of the salt, nutmeg, and pepper to taste. Place plastic wrap on the surface of the sauce and set aside until ready to assemble the lasagna. (The sauce can be made a day ahead and refrigerated. Reheat before assembling the lasagna. )**

**Meanwhile, cook the noodles. Bring a large pot of water to a boil, season generously with salt, and boil the lasagna noodles according to package instructions. Drain. Spread the noodles out and layer between pieces of plastic wrap. Set aside.**

**Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Butter an ovenproof 9 x 13-inch casserole dish.**

**Cover the bottom of the pan with a layer of noodles. Cover with 1 1/2 cups of the meat sauce, 1 cup of the white sauce and 3 tablespoons of the cheese. Repeat to make 3 more layers ending with the remaining meat sauce, white sauce, and cheese. Dot the top with the remaining tablespoon of butter. Bake until bubbly and hot, about 45 to 50 minutes. Remove from the oven and set aside for 10 minutes to firm up before serving.**

**Meat and Tomato Sauce:**

**1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil**

**1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes**

**1 large onion, diced**

**6 cloves garlic, minced**

**1/4 cup Italian tomato paste**

**Four 28-ounce cans whole peeled tomatoes, with liquid**

**2 teaspoons kosher salt plus to taste**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**1/2 pound ground beef**

**1/2 pound ground veal**

**1/2 pound ground pork**

1 tablespoon dried savory or rosemary, crumbled into small pieces

1 tablespoon dried thyme

1 tablespoon dried oregano

1 tablespoon fennel seeds, cracked

2 bay leaves

Rind of Parmesan, about 2- to 4-inches long (optional)

1/2 to 1 cup grated Parmesan

In a large soup pot or Dutch oven, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the pepper flakes and cook for 15 seconds. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, about 15 minutes. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in the tomato paste and cook, stirring constantly, for 1 minute. Add the tomatoes one at a time, crushing them by hand as you go. Season with 1 teaspoon salt and pepper to taste. Simmer the sauce over low heat, covered.

Meanwhile, heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the beef, pork, veal, savory, thyme, oregano, and fennel seeds. Season with 1 teaspoon salt and pepper. Break up the meat with a wooden spoon, and cook until it loses its raw color, about 7 minutes. Add the meat to the sauce, holding back any excess fat.

Add the rind of the Parmesan, if using. Simmer the sauce, covered, over low heat, for 1 1/2 hours. (If the sauce gets too thick, adjust the consistency with water.) Season with salt and pepper to taste. Just before serving, remove the Parmesan rind and add the grated cheese.

## Orzo with Parsley and Lemon Zest



1/2 pound orzo

Coarse salt

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, eyeball it

2 large lemons, zested

## **Black pepper**

1/4 cup finely chopped flat leaf parsley, a couple of handfuls

Cook orzo in salted water about 12 minutes, to al dente. Drain orzo well. Do not run under cold water. You want the cooked pasta to remain hot. Transfer pasta to a serving bowl. Drizzle orzo with a tablespoon of extra virgin olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Add lemon zest and parsley and toss to combine the flavors with the pasta.

## **Pasta Pomodorini**

3/4 pound spaghetti or spaghettini

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling

1/4 cup sliced garlic

1/2 teaspoon finely minced Calabrian chiles, or 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes

1 pint small cherry tomatoes, stems removed, crushed between your thumb and forefinger

1/2 cup fresh basil leaves, each torn into 2 or 3 pieces

Gray salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Parmesan, for grating

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the pasta and stir.

While the pasta cooks, heat 1/4 cup olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook until the slivers are golden brown and crisp, then add the chiles and cook for about 30 seconds. Raise the heat to high and add the tomatoes. Cook until the tomatoes soften and the juices thicken, about 3 minutes. Add the basil and season with salt and pepper.

When the pasta is al dente, scoop out about 1/2 cup of the pasta cooking water, then drain the pasta.

Return the pasta to the warm pot off the heat. Add the sauce and mix well. Add some of the reserved cooking water if the pasta seems dry. Transfer to a warm serving bowl and grate Parmesan over the top, to taste. Drizzle with a little more olive oil. Serve immediately.

## **Penne with Baby Mozzarella, Tomatoes, and Herbs**

12 ounces penne rigate or other small tube pasta, like ziti, or short fusilli (corkscrews)

4 sprigs fresh oregano

2 sprigs fresh thyme

1 clove garlic, smashed

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt, plus as needed

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**1 pound baby mozzarella (boconccini), drained**

**2 tablespoons fruity extra-virgin olive oil, plus for drizzling**

**3 large ripe tomatoes (about 1 1/2 pounds)**

**1/2 cup flat-leaf parsley leaves, roughly chopped**

**1/2 cup pitted kalamata olives**

**Bring a large pot of cold water to a boil over high heat, then salt it generously, add the pasta, and cook, stirring occasionally, until al dente. Drain.**

**Meanwhile, strip the leaves from the oregano and thyme sprigs. Chop them together with the garlic, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and the pepper, and then use the flat side of the knife to mash and smear the mixture to a coarse paste. Put in a bowl, along with the cheese, olive oil and toss to coat the cheese with the herb paste. Cut the tomatoes into pieces about the same size as the cheese. Gently fold the tomatoes, parsley, and olives in with the cheese. Add the drained pasta and toss, then drizzle over a bit of olive oil and toss again. Serve now or room temperature.**

## **Sausage and Eggplant**

### **Stuffed Shells in a Tomato-Basil Cream Sauce**

**2 tablespoons olive oil**

**3/4 pound sweet Italian sausage, casings removed**

**2 cups chopped onion**

**1 large eggplant, cut into 1/2-inch cubes (about 7 cups cubed)**

**1 1/2 teaspoons salt**

**3/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper**

**2 tablespoons minced garlic**

**1/2 cup ricotta or mascarpone cheese**

**12 ounces fresh spinach, blanched, squeezed dry, and chopped (about 2/3 cup chopped)**

**1 cup freshly grated Parmesan**

**1/4 teaspoon sugar**

**1/2 (12-ounce) package jumbo pasta shells (about 18 shells)**

**2 cups Italian crushed tomatoes**

**3 cups heavy cream**

**1/4 cup finely chopped fresh basil leaves**

4 ounces coarsely grated fontina cheese

In a large skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of the olive oil over medium-high heat and saute the sausage until golden brown, stirring to break up the pieces, about 6 minutes. Add half of the onions and the eggplant, season with  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt and  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon crushed red pepper, and cook for 4 to 6 minutes, or until the vegetables are lightly caramelized and very soft. Add 1 tablespoon garlic and cook for 1 minute. Remove from the heat and transfer to a large bowl to cool.

When the mixture has cooled to room temperature, stir in the ricotta or mascarpone cheese, spinach,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup Parmesan cheese, and sugar. Stir to combine well.

Lightly grease a deep 9 by 13-inch casserole or lasagna pan and set aside.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook the pasta shells until just al dente, 10 to 12 minutes.

Drain and rinse under cold running water. Pat shells dry. Stuff the pasta shells with the sausage-eggplant mixture and place in the prepared casserole dish.

In a large saucepan, heat the remaining tablespoon of olive oil over medium high heat and saute the remaining chopped onions until translucent, about 4 minutes. Add the remaining tablespoon of garlic and cook until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the crushed tomatoes, remaining  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt, and remaining  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon crushed red pepper and cook for 5 minutes. Add the heavy cream and cook until the sauce is reduced in volume by about  $\frac{1}{3}$ , about 20 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Add the basil to the sauce and pour the sauce over the shells in the casserole. Sprinkle with the fontina cheese and the remaining Parmesan. Cover the casserole tightly with aluminum foil and bake for 45 minutes. Remove the foil and continue baking until the sauce is lightly browned in spots and bubbly around the edges, about 15 minutes longer. Let stand for 10 minutes before serving.

## **Spaghetti alla Carbonara**

1 pound dry spaghetti

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

4 ounces pancetta or slab bacon, cubed or sliced into small strips

4 garlic cloves, finely chopped

2 large eggs

1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for serving

Freshly ground black pepper

1 handful fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped

Prepare the sauce while the pasta is cooking to ensure that the spaghetti will be hot and ready when the sauce is finished; it is very important that the pasta is hot when adding the egg mixture, so that the heat of the pasta cooks the raw eggs in the sauce.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil, add the pasta and cook for 8 to 10 minutes or until tender yet firm (as they say in Italian "al dente.") Drain the pasta well, reserving 1/2 cup of the starchy cooking water to use in the sauce if you wish.

Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a deep skillet over medium flame. Add the pancetta and saute for about 3 minutes, until the bacon is crisp and the fat is rendered. Toss the garlic into the fat and saute for less than 1 minute to soften.

Add the hot, drained spaghetti to the pan and toss for 2 minutes to coat the strands in the bacon fat. Beat the eggs and Parmesan together in a mixing bowl, stirring well to prevent lumps. Remove the pan from the heat and pour the egg/cheese mixture into the pasta, whisking quickly until the eggs thicken, but do not scramble (this is done off the heat to ensure this does not happen.) Thin out the sauce with a bit of the reserved pasta water, until it reaches desired consistency. Season the carbonara with several turns of freshly ground black pepper and taste for salt. Mound the spaghetti carbonara into warm serving bowls and garnish with chopped parsley. Pass more cheese around the table.

## Wild Mushroom Ravioli with Butter and Parmesan Sauce



2 packages (11-ounce) fresh wild mushroom ravioli

1 cup unsalted butter

1/2 cup fresh basil leaves

6 tablespoons toasted pine nuts

1 whole nutmeg or 1/2 teaspoon grated nutmeg

2/3 cup grated Parmesan

Cook the ravioli in a large pot of boiling salted water until just cooked through, about 5 minutes. Drain and put on a platter.

Meanwhile, cook the butter in a heavy medium frying pan over medium-high heat until pale golden, about 4 minutes. Add the basil leaves and cook until lightly fried, about 2 minutes. Add the pine nuts. Pour over the cooked ravioli. Grate 1/2 teaspoon of nutmeg directly over ravioli. Sprinkle Parmesan over dish and serve

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