

## **PASTA**

### **HISTORY**

There is some controversy about the origins of pasta. Many claim that it was brought to Italy by Marco Polo in the 13th century from China, where it was first developed. Some link it to the ancient Greeks, and others to the Etruscans but, in any event, it ended up in Rome. Still other food historians say that it was invented in the Near East and arrived in Italy during the time of the Arab conquests, somewhere between the 7th and 13th centuries. The first recorded evidence of pasta in Italy comes from a Genoese merchant who, in an inventory, lists "macharonis" of probable Sicilian origin. It is undoubtedly the Genoese who spread the art of pasta-making throughout Italy, although the Sicilians were the ones to first master the craft of making dried pastas.

### **COOKING TIPS**

The ideal way to cook pasta is "al dente" which means "to the tooth" - pasta that is still a bit firm when tasted.

Do not add the pasta until the water is at a full boil. The water should be lightly salted.

Adding a bit of oil will help keep the pasta strands separated and prevent the cooking liquid from foaming.

Most dried pasta takes 12-15 minutes to cook. The short-cut pasta takes about 7 minutes.

Fresh pasta needs less cooking time, 3-5 minutes.

For stuffed pasta, which takes approximately 8-12 minutes to cook depending on the dough and kind of stuffing, biting the edge and not the stuffed area is the best way to ensure that it is cooked "al dente." Gnocchi, on the other hand, is ready to eat when it rises to the surface. If cooked longer it becomes mushy.

When cooking a pasta with a seafood sauce make sure that the pasta is cooked less than "al dente," left hard to the touch. This allows the partly-cooked pasta to cook longer with the seafood, and to soak in its flavors.

There is a legend among Italian chefs which states that pasta is ready when it is thrown against a ceramic tiled wall and sticks there! Tasting pasta to test its readiness is the most reliable method and a lot less messy.

### **STORING PASTA**

Store dried pasta at room temperature in an airtight container. Check the package for the "use by" date.

Store fresh pasta in the refrigerator and use it within a few days of making. If purchasing fresh pasta, check the "use by" date for freshness. You can freeze fresh pasta and it can be cooked without defrosting. It will keep for quite a long time. Do not freeze cooked pasta - it will not hold its flavor or texture.

### **FRESH PASTA**

#### **TOOLS:**

##### *CHITARRA*

Chitarra, a wooden frame with steel wires strung across the top, shapes and cuts maccheroni all chitarra (a flat, square spaghetti). Place a flat sheet of dough onto the wires and push it downward with a rolling pin.

### *COOKIE CUTTER*

In pasta making, this tool is most commonly used for cutting dough into easily stuffed circles of pasta. Cookie cutters are sold in varying sizes and designs.

### *GARGANELLI MAKER*

Otherwise known as a butter pat, a garganelli maker is shaped like a comb in order to create grooves in the dough.

### *PASTA MACHINE*

This machine is either electric-motor or hand-crank operated. It contains rollers that flatten the pasta and ribbon cutters which cut it into different widths. This tool makes pasta preparation easier, faster and more fun.

### *PASTRY BAG*

Besides their use in making desserts, pastry bags can serve as a tool for filling pasta with a stuffing of choice.

### *PASTRY WHEEL*

Pastry wheels are perfect for cutting pasta, creating an attractive fluted edge.

### *ROLLING PIN*

Before the preparation and cutting of the actual pasta, the rolling pin is used to smooth out and flatten the dough. The amount of dough rolled at one time depends upon the length and thickness of the rolling pin.

## **PREPARING FRESH PASTA**

Basic Pasta Dough

### INGREDIENTS:

Servings: 6:

Unbleached white flour 2 1/4 cups/ 265 g  
Large eggs 3 or 2 large eggs and 2 egg yolks  
Salt pinch

### PREPARATION:

#### *Prepare the dough:*

Sift the flour onto a work surface and make a well in the center. Break the eggs into the well and mix it with a fork. Draw in flour from the sides and continue to mix until it is well blended.

Sprinkle flour over the mixture and knead it with your hands for 10 minutes until it is elastic but still firm. It may be necessary to add more flour to achieve this.

Shape the dough into a ball, cover it with a kitchen towel, and let it rest for 15 minutes.

Knead the dough again for 5-10 minutes until very smooth and pliable.

Cover the dough and let rest for 20 minutes.

## **COLORED PASTA**

RED PASTA- To prepare a red pasta just add one tbs of tomato paste for each egg in the recipe.

GREEN PASTA - For green pasta, add 4oz/ 120 g of fresh spinach or 2 1/2oz/ 75 g of thawed frozen spinach for every egg called for in the recipe.

YELLOW PASTA - The spice, saffron is used to make the dough yellow. Begin by soaking a pinch of dried or some finely chopped strands of saffron in 2 tbs of water. Let the saffron soak for

approximately 5 minutes and then mix it into the dough.

## **GNOCCHI**

Rch Potato Gnocchi

### **INGREDIENTS:**

Servings: 6:

Potatoes (preferably, not fresh) 3 lbs  
Plain flour 2 cups  
Eggs 4  
salt 1 tsp  
Pinch of white pepper  
Pinch of grated nutmeg  
Parmesan or pecoreno cheese 1 cup/ 1/4 lb

### **PREPARATION:**

Fill a saucepan with water and a pinch of salt. Bring to a boil and cook for approximately 20 minutes or until tender. Drain the water and allow the potatoes to cool. Peel and then *mash the potatoes*. This can be done a day ahead if the potatoes are covered and refrigerated.

*Combine* the flour, eggs, salt, white pepper, nutmeg and parmesan, and then stir the mixture into the mashed potatoes.

*Knead the mixture* until you have a workable dough. Flour the work surface. Cut the dough it into eight parts. *Shape* each part into a thick strip. Cut each strip lengthwise into one-inch parts and shape it with a fork or garganelli maker.

Fill a pot with water and a pinch of salt. Bring the water to a boil and then *place the gnocchi* into the pot. Be careful not to overcrowd the pot. If cooking only a portion of the gnocchi, place it in a warm bowl when ready and cover. Then place the remaining gnocchi into the boiling water and cook.

Variations of gnocchi include: *Gnocchi Roman style, pumpkin gnocchi and green gnocchi.*

## **PASTA SHAPES**

### **LONG PASTA**

Spaghetti is the best-known pasta shape: long, narrow and sturdy. *Spaghetti in clam sauce* is a common favorite among patrons of Italian cuisine.

Spaghettini is thin spaghetti.

*Capelli d'Angelo*, means "angel hair."

Linguine means "tongues." It is a flat spaghetti and a versatile pasta that makes a delicious meal when combined with a versatile sauce, such as *pesto*.

Bucatini is a thick, hollow spaghetti also known as "perciatelli."

Fusilli is a spiraled spaghetti that comes in varying sizes.

### **RIBBON PASTA**

Pappardelle is the widest, ribbon egg noodle.

Tagliatelle originated in Bologna and is the most familiar of the ribbon pastas. It is nicely accompanied by a *Ragu Bolognese* sauce.

Tonnarelli originated in *Abruzzi* and is traditionally cut on a *chitarra*.

Fettuccine, also known as "trenette," are long, flat noodles.

Tagliolini is a narrow ribbon pasta. It is usually served with a *broth*, rather than a sauce, because it is a delicate, thin pasta.

#### TUBULAR PASTA

Penne ("pens") is a short, tubular pasta cut at an angle. It can be served with a heavy meat sauce, like a *lamb ragu*.

*Garganelli* is a handmade, egg-based, tubular pasta.

Cavatappi ("corkscrews") is a thick, twisted pasta.

Macaroni are hollow pasta tubes cut in varying lengths. *Vegetable sauces* go well with tubular pastas because their cavities capture the vegetable pieces.

Tubetti are small pasta tubes.

Rigatoni are ridged pasta tubes.

Millerighe ("thousand lines") are multi-ridged pasta tubes.

Gigantoni ("giants") are the largest of the tubular pasta shapes.

Ziti ("spinsters" or "bachelors") is a thick macaroni.

#### SPECIAL SHAPES

Farfalle ("bow ties") is a butterfly shaped pasta.

Conchiglie ("shells") range in size from very small to quite large. The shape of conchiglie pasta, together with the taste of a *sardine sauce*, will undoubtedly remind the chef of an oceanside meal.

*Gnocchi* are potato dumplings in their most basic form, although there are ingredient, size and shape variations.

Chianti Specialty is pasta shaped into grapes or leaves and colored appropriately.

Lumache ("snails") come in varying sizes and are good with thick sauces.

Orecchiette ("little ears") are native to *Apulia* where they are, to this day, handmade.

Radiatori ("radiators") is a deeply-ridged thick pasta shape.

Fusilli is a short, springy pasta, either long or short. Why not try fusilli pasta with a *shepherd's sauce*? Both are easy to make and delicious to eat.

Strozzapreti ("priest stranglers") is a thick, twisted pasta.

Ruote di carro ("cartwheels") is the fun, wheel-shaped pasta popular in *Sicily*.

#### SOUP PASTA

Quadrucci is a small, square-shaped pasta. Choosing a pasta for a *bean and pasta soup* is important for the outcome of the dish. Adding quadrucci is a good way to ensure the success of this meal.

Risoni is the small, rice-shaped pasta.

Alfabetini is the pasta in the shape of letters.

Stelline is a star-shaped pasta. Add it to liven up any *soup* especially when serving it to children.

Anelli siciliani is a ring-shaped pasta.

Acini di pepe are small dots of pasta.

#### STUFFED PASTA

*Ravioli* is a small, stuffed pasta.

Pansoti is a triangular-shaped stuffed pasta.

Tortellini are square or circular folded pasta that are stuffed and then pinched into rings. They can be stuffed with virtually anything. Matching the stuffing with the *sauce* is the first step in creating a great pasta dish.

Cannelloni is a pipe-shaped pasta.

Lasagne is the wide pasta shape that is layered with sauce and baked, to make the classic dish *Lasagne*.

Cappelletti is a small, pleated pasta.