

Pasta with Ratatouille-Style Vegetables

This recipe is perfect when you have a glut of vegetables in your garden or you are simply trying to eat more fresh produce. Grill the vegetables outdoors or indoors, or cook them under the broiler.

In a large fry pan over medium heat, warm the 2 Tbs. olive oil. Add the onion, bell peppers, thyme and red pepper flakes, and season with salt and black pepper. Sauté until the peppers are tender, about 15 minutes. Add the tomatoes with their juice, breaking up the tomatoes with a spoon. Add the wine and simmer, stirring frequently, to blend the flavors, 15 to 20 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasonings with salt and black pepper, adding a pinch of sugar if the sauce tastes too acidic.

Prepare a medium-hot fire in an outdoor grill, or preheat an electric indoor grill or grill pan over medium-high heat. Alternatively, preheat a broiler.

Arrange the eggplant and zucchini on a rimmed baking sheet, brush on both sides with olive oil, and season with salt and black pepper. Transfer the vegetables to the grill rack, cover and grill until tender, about 5 minutes per side. Or place the vegetables on the indoor grill or grill pan, cover if possible and cook as directed above. Alternatively, transfer the baking sheet to the broiler and broil the vegetables until tender, about 5 minutes per side. Cut the eggplant and zucchini into bite-size pieces and add to the sauce. Add the basil.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot three-fourths full of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the pasta, stir well and cook until al dente, about 11 minutes. Drain the pasta, add it to the sauce and toss to coat. Transfer to a warmed large shallow bowl. Sprinkle generously with cheese and serve immediately. Serves 4.

Quick Tips: Canned San Marzano tomatoes from Italy, available in many supermarkets and Italian delis, add appealing sweetness to the sauce. Buy a few cans to have on hand for last-minute meals. This pasta dish reheats well; put leftovers in a fry pan, add a little water, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the ingredients are heated through.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Weeknight Fresh & Fast*, by Kristine Kidd (Weldon Owen, Inc., 2011).

Ingredients for Pasta with Ratatouille-Style Vegetables

2 Tbs. olive oil, plus more as needed

1 large yellow onion, finely chopped

1 red bell pepper, thinly sliced, slices cut crosswise into thirds

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2 tsp. minced fresh thyme

Pinch of red pepper flakes

Coarse kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 can (28 oz.) Italian tomatoes in juice, preferably San Marzano

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup dry white wine

Pinch of sugar (optional)

2 Asian eggplant, cut lengthwise into thirds

2 zucchini, cut lengthwise into thirds

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh basil

12 oz. rotini or fusilli pasta, preferably multigrain

Crumbled fresh goat cheese for serving

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Dried Pasta Shapes

Spaghetti: long, cylindrical “small strings” about $\frac{1}{12}$ inch thick and 10 inches long

Orecchiette: “small ears,” these pasta are coin-sized with indentations to hold sauce

Ziti: smooth-surfaced, medium-sized tube pasta often used in baked pasta dishes

Malloredus: small, ridged, canoe-shaped pasta from Sardinia

Rigatoni: large, ridged tube pasta that can range from $1\frac{3}{4}$ to $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches long

Capellini: also known as “angel hair,” the delicate strands of this pasta are less than $\frac{1}{16}$ inch thick

Ditalini: these “small thimbles” are short cylinders with either smooth or ridged surfaces

Fusilli: translated as “little spindles” but also commonly referred to as “corkscrews”

Farfalle: scalloped and pinched, these pasta are often called “bow ties”

Spaghettini: resembling spaghetti but only $\frac{1}{16}$ inch thick

Conchiglie: often called “shells,” this conch shell-shaped pasta comes in many sizes

Cavatelli: these bun-shaped pasta are formed from rounds that are rolled in on themselves

Gemelli: these small, slender pasta are made up of two intertwined tubes, thus their name, which translates to “twins”

Bucatini: long, thin, hollow tubes of pasta

Penne: short tubes cut on the diagonal, these “quills” are about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick and 2 inches long, and can be found with smooth or ridged surfaces

Linguine: somewhere between a narrow ribbon and flattened piece of spaghetti, with strands measuring about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch wide and $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches long

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Technique Class: Fresh & Fast: Pasta

Few foods are more universal than pasta. In Italy, which boasts a wealth of recipes for both making noodles and for dressing them with an unbelievable array of sauces, it is a gastronomical passion. In nearly every culture where pasta is enjoyed, its myriad forms engage the cook’s imagination. Whether fresh or dried, stuffed or baked, sauced, in a soup, steamed or stir-fried, pasta is one of the most welcome sights on the dinner table.

Matching Sauces and Pasta

Italians have strong opinions about which pastas are best with which sauces. The ideal match is one that brings the sauce and pasta into a unified whole. Thus, thinner sauces tend to be served with longer pasta because they coat it evenly, and chunkier sauces go with smaller pasta shapes that trap plenty of sauce. The more substantial the sauce, the more substantial the pasta.

SAUCE	PASTA
Butter sauces	Conchiglie, farfalle, tagliatelle
Cheese sauces	Bucatini, conchiglie, farfalle, fusilli, gemelli, macaroni
Light oil-based sauces	Capellini, farfalle, spaghetti, spaghettini
Pesto	Bucatini, linguine, penne
Ragù and meat sauces	Bucatini, conchiglie, fettuccine, fusilli, gemelli, linguine, orecchiette, pappardelle, penne, rigatoni, spaghetti, ziti
Seafood sauces	Linguine, spaghetti, spaghettini
Tomato sauces	Conchiglie, farfalle, linguine, penne, spaghetti, spaghettini, tagliatelle
Vegetable sauces	Cavatelli, gemelli, orecchiette, penne, rigatoni, ziti
Broths and soups	Small pasta shapes such as ditalini, orzo, tubetti, stelline, small macaroni
Baked pastas	Lasagna, penne, ziti

Pairing Wine with Pasta

The wine selection for pasta dishes will depend on the sauces and flavorings.

Cheese Sauce: The range of options is wide, but aim for a red or white wine with good acidity.

Cream Sauce: A buttery California Chardonnay matches strength to strength; for contrast, try a zingy Sauvignon Blanc.

Pesto Sauce: Serve a young red wine, such as a Dolcetto from Italy, a Beaujolais from France or a Zinfandel from California.

Tomato Sauce: Counter the acidity of the tomatoes with an acidic white wine. If the sauce has garlic and meat, however, you could go for a fruity red wine, such as an Australian Shiraz or a young red Rioja from Spain.

White Vegetarian Lasagna

Cooked dried lasagna noodles are layered with an assortment of mushrooms and spinach for a meatless baked pasta dish that departs from the common tomato-cheese combination. As in most baked pasta dishes, a creamy sauce plays a crucial role in binding the ingredients together and keeping the pasta moist.

For a variation, substitute other fresh vegetables for the mushrooms. Roasted summer squash slices, parboiled artichoke hearts or roasted eggplant slices are all wonderful additions to this lasagna.

In a large pot over high heat, bring 5 quarts water to a rapid boil. Check the package directions for the cooking time, then add the kosher salt and pasta to the boiling water, stir well and cook, stirring occasionally, until the pasta is half-cooked. Drain and rinse under cold running water. Toss the noodles with the olive oil to prevent them from sticking together and set aside on clean, damp kitchen towels.

In a saucepan over medium heat, warm the milk until small bubbles appear around the edges of the pan, then remove from the heat.

Meanwhile, in a heavy saucepan over low heat, melt 4 Tbs. of the butter. Add the flour and sea salt and stir vigorously with a wooden spoon to remove any lumps. Cook, stirring often, for about 4 minutes. Gradually add the hot milk while stirring constantly, then continue cooking, stirring often, until the sauce is smooth and thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, about 5 minutes. Add 2 cups of the broth and cook, stirring, until well mixed and heated through. Remove the sauce from the heat and cover to keep warm.

While the sauce is cooking, in a saucepan over high heat, bring the remaining 2 cups broth to a boil. Add the carrots, cover and cook until just tender, about 4 minutes. Drain well over a bowl, reserving the carrots and broth separately.

In a large fry pan over medium heat, melt the remaining 2 Tbs. butter. Add the mushrooms and sauté until lightly colored and nearly tender, 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in the thyme, remove from the heat and set aside.

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Preheat an oven to 350°F.

Gently reheat the sauce over low heat. Ladle ¼ cup of the sauce onto the bottom of a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Lay 3 or 4 noodles, side by side but not overlapping, on top of the sauce. Scatter half of the spinach evenly over the noodles. Top evenly with half of the basil leaves. Distribute half of the carrots evenly over the basil. Arrange another layer of noodles over the carrots. Distribute the mushroom mixture evenly over the noodles. Ladle a scant 2 cups of the sauce over the mushrooms. Top evenly with half of the mozzarella and then half of the Parmigiano-Reggiano. Arrange another layer of the noodles on top of the cheese, and top with the remaining spinach and then the remaining basil. Distribute the remaining carrots evenly over the basil. Ladle the remaining sauce evenly over the top, and then sprinkle with the remaining mozzarella, followed by the remaining Parmigiano-Reggiano. Pour the reserved 2 cups broth evenly along the sides of the dish, being careful not to disturb the topping.

Bake until the topping is browned and bubbling, 40 to 45 minutes. Let the lasagna stand for 15 minutes before serving. Serves 4 to 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *The Pasta Book*, by Julia Della Croce (Weldon Owen, Inc., 2010)

Pappardelle with Quick Bolognese Sauce

Peppery pancetta, robust Italian tomatoes and fresh thyme embellish this quick version of the traditionally long-cooking sauce. Serve it over egg pappardelle or fettuccine with a mixed green salad alongside.

In a large fry pan over medium heat, warm the olive oil. Add the onion and sauté until tender and beginning to brown, about 5 minutes. Increase the heat to medium-high and add the ground beef and pancetta. Season with salt and pepper and sauté, breaking up the beef with a wooden spoon, just until the beef is no longer pink.

Add the wine and boil until it has almost evaporated, about 3 minutes. Add the tomatoes with their juice, the broth, cream and nutmeg. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, breaking up the tomatoes and stirring occasionally, until the sauce is slightly thickened and the flavors are blended, about 30 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasonings with salt and pepper.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot three-fourths full of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the pasta, stir well and cook until just tender, about 8 minutes. Drain the pasta and return it to the same pot. Add the sauce and toss to coat.

Divide the pasta and sauce among 4 warmed shallow bowls. Sprinkle each with the thyme and cheese. Serve immediately, passing more cheese alongside. Serves 4.

Quick Tips: A touch of heavy cream replaces the milk usually used in Bolognese sauce; it lends a silky texture in a shorter cooking time. The sauce keeps well and is even richer in flavor when reheated, so make it a day or two ahead or prepare extra to freeze. Spaghetti is another good pasta choice.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Weeknight Fresh & Fast*, by Kristine Kidd (Weldon Owen, Inc., 2011).

Ingredients for Pappardelle with Quick Bolognese Sauce

1 Tbs. olive oil

1 large yellow onion, finely chopped

1 lb. ground beef

2 oz. pancetta, finely chopped

Coarse kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

½ cup dry white wine

1 can (14.5 oz.) whole tomatoes in juice, preferably San Marzano

¾ cup low-sodium chicken broth

1 to 2 Tbs. heavy cream

⅓ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg

12 oz. dried egg pappardelle or fettuccine

1 Tbs. minced fresh thyme

Grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese for serving

Ingredients for White Vegetarian Lasagna

2 Tbs. kosher salt

9 to 12 dried lasagna noodles

2 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil

2 cups milk

6 Tbs. (¾ stick) unsalted butter

¼ cup unbleached all-purpose flour

½ tsp. fine sea salt

4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth

4 large carrots, peeled and shredded (about 4 cups)

10 oz. assorted fresh mushrooms, brushed clean, tough stems removed and caps chopped

2 Tbs. minced fresh thyme

10 oz. baby spinach

1½ cups fresh basil leaves

1 lb. fresh mozzarella cheese, shredded

1 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese