



Pasta Making

Freshly cooked homemade pasta is far superior to the commercially produced alternatives. The following quantities are only guidelines: depending on the humidity, type of flour etc, you may need to add a little more flour. The dough must not be too soft – it should be quite hard to knead. Too much extra flour will make the pasta tough and taste floury.

Plain Pasta

200g strong white flour
Pinch of salt
2 eggs
15ml olive oil

Beetroot Pasta:

200g strong white flour
Pinch of salt
2 eggs (medium)
2 tbsp cooked beetroot puree

Tomato Pasta:

200g strong white flour
Pinch of salt
2 eggs (medium)
30ml (2 tbsp) tomato puree or sun-dried tomato paste (from tube not can)

Herb Pasta:

200g strong white flour
Pinch of salt
2 eggs (medium)
45ml (3 tbsp) chopped fresh herbs
15ml (1tbsp) olive oil

Olive Pasta:

200g strong white flour
Pinch of salt
2 eggs (medium)
30ml black olive paste (black olive pesto can be substituted but reduce quantity)

NB: Blend all ingredients before mixing with the flour

Traditional method of making pasta:

Sift the flour and salt onto a clean work surface and make a well in the centre with your fist. Beat the eggs and oil together and pour into the well.

Gradually mix the liquid ingredients into the flour, using the fingers of one hand. Knead the pasta until smooth. Wrap in cling film and allow to rest for at least 30 minutes before attempting to roll out; the pasta will be much more elastic after resting.

Using a food processor:

Sift the flour and salt into the bowl. Pour in the beaten eggs and oil, together with any flavourings and process until the dough begins to come together. Turn out and knead until smooth. Wrap in cling film and rest for at least 30 minutes.

**Rolling out using a Pasta Machine:**

Feed the rested dough through the widest setting several times. Pass the pasta through the machine, narrowing the setting by one notch each time, until the required thickness is reached. Generally, the second from last setting is best for tagliatelle; the finest setting is used for ravioli or other pasta that is to be filled.

Once the required thickness is reached, hang the pasta over a piece of dowelling or a clean broom handle to dry a little; this will make cutting easier as the pasta won't be as sticky. (If you are making stuffed pasta, drying isn't necessary because it needs to be slightly sticky to adhere properly.)

Fit the appropriate cutters to the machine. Pass the pasta through, then transfer to a tray covered with a lightly dusting of flour. Toss the pasta lightly in the flour or drape the pasta over the dowelling or broom handle again allowing to dry a little until ready to cook.

Rolling out by hand:

On a clean (not floured) surface, roll out one third of the dough to a 5mm (1/4 inch) thickness. Lift the dough from the surface and rotate 45°. The dough should "cling" (not stick) to the surface; this helps in the stretching process. Continue rolling, lifting and rotating until the dough is very thin. Repeat with remaining dough.

To Cook Pasta:

As a guide, you will need 4 litres (7 pints) of water and 45ml (3 tbsp) salt to every 350-450g (12 oz-1lb) fresh or dried pasta. A tablespoon of olive oil will help to stop the water boil over and prevent the pasta sticking but if you have enough water in the pan and you stir the pasta as it goes in, it will not stick. Add the pasta to a large pan of boiling salted water and stir once to prevent sticking. Do not cover, or the water will boil over.

Quickly bring the pasta back to a rolling boil, stir once and boil until al dente, literally to the tooth. The pasta should be just firm to the bite; it should not have a hard centre, nor should it be very floppy. Calculate the cooking time from the moment the pasta starts to boil again.

Fresh unfilled pasta such as spaghetti and tagliatelle, usually takes 2-3 minutes to cook. But note that very thin pasta can be ready almost as soon as the water returns to the boil. Ordinary dried pasta generally cooks in 8-12 minutes, but it is important to keep checking as this is only a guide. For fresh filled pasta, such as ravioli, and tortelloni, allow 5-10 minutes for dried, allow 15-20 minutes.

Quickly drain the pasta well using a large colander or sieve. Hold back 30-45ml (2-3 tbsp) of the cooking water – this will help the sauce to cling to the pasta. Dress the pasta immediately with the sauce, oil or butter. Serve hot pasta straight away. It is up to you whether you toss the sauce before serving or serve it piled on top of the pasta. Either way, the pasta should be tossed with the sauce before eating.



Open Ravioli with Wild Mushroom and Chicken Sauce

(Serves 4)

For the sauce:

2 chicken fillets, diced
1 onion, finely chopped
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
1 tsp thyme, chopped
1 tbsp flat parsley, chopped
160g wild mushrooms, trimmed and wiped
2 tbsp butter
100ml white wine
120ml double cream

Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tbsp olive oil

Make the pasta dough as per the pasta making instructions above, wrap in cling film and rest for at least 30 minutes.

1. To make the sauce, heat the oil in a large frying pan, add the diced chicken and sauté, add the onion and cook until softened.
2. Add the garlic and cook for about 1 minute followed by the thyme and parsley.
3. Add the butter, melt and add the wine, cook for 1 to 2 minutes, add the mushrooms, sauté until just cooked.
4. Stir in the cream and set aside.
5. Divide the dough into 5 equal pieces; roll the dough through all the settings on your pasta machine, ending with the second to last setting. Keep the dough you are not working with covered with a damp cloth. Cut the dough into 12cm x 8cm rectangles.
6. Bring a large pot of salted water to the boil. Add a little olive oil. Cook the rectangles for about 2 – 3 minutes and carefully lift them out with a slotted spoon.
7. To serve, gently toss the pasta rectangles with the sauce. Sprinkle over a few parmesan shavings and serve immediately.