

HOMEMADE PASTA

This recipe makes a lot of pasta. It was originally designed to be enough pasta dough for me to divide into 5 balls, and roll each ball to about a 14" by 16" oval which I would cut in half and use to make ravioli (60 of them) and all the scraps would get thrown away, and there was a lot to throw. If you use a pasta extruder, this recipe will make enough pasta to serve 6 people easily. If you don't need that much, you might want to consider halving this recipe.

There are several critical factors to making really good pasta. The flour you use, the consistency of your dough, and how long it is cooked. The best flour to use is Semolina flour which is a very hard grain with loads of gluten in it. It feels more like finely ground corn meal than flour, and is sort of scary to work with for the first time. Don't be scared though, the results are worth it. I have made this recipe using bread flour with very good results, but it makes a softer and mushier noodle.

The consistency of the dough is very important, because if you get it wrong, it is miserable stuff to work with. If you are using a pasta machine with an extruder, the consistency of the dough, after mixing for about 10 minutes, should be grainy with pea sized globs. The directions for your machine should be followed. If you are going to be rolling it by hand or with a pasta roller, it should be a little bit moister. It should start to form a ball after 3 or 4 minutes of mixing. Continue to mix for a total of 10 minutes or so. Adjust the moisture by adding water 1 teaspoon at a time and mixing at least a minute before adjusting again, or if it's too moist, add flour 1 Tablespoon at a time and mix at least 1 minute before making any other adjustments. One nice thing about pasta dough is that it is very hard to overwork your dough (unlike bread dough). Keep making adjustments until you are happy with the consistency, and make sure the ingredients are thoroughly mixed. When you are satisfied with your creation, place it in a baggie or cover with a damp towel for about 20 minutes before you try to work it.

The other critical factor is cooking time. This will vary depending on the thickness of the pasta, the flour you use, and the hydration level of your pasta. Ideally, pasta should be cooked *al dente*, which literally means "to the teeth" meaning your pasta should have a bit of a chewy texture, not be mush like the noodles in chicken noodle soup. Fresh pasta only needs about 2 to 3 minutes to cook. When I make ravioli, I like to let it sit on cookie racks for a few hours to dry a bit, which gives it a little firmer texture. You can do this with any shape pasta you desire. Just make sure you are drying everything equally by spreading it out, and moving it around from time to time.

Always add pasta to boiling water. You can add salt if you like, but there is no need. It's a good idea to put 1 - 2 Tablespoons olive oil in the pot since this will help prevent boil-overs.

Stir often. Fresh pasta can have a tendency to clump together.

After the pasta has been cooking for 2 minutes, fish a piece out and taste it. If it is not quite done yet, test again every 30 seconds until it is. When it's the right texture, strain immediately and rinse briefly with cold water. You want to rinse of the extra starches which

will cause the pasta to stick together, and also want to cool it a bit to stop it from continuing to cook, but you don't want to serve cold pasta either, so rinse quickly and gently. If you like, once it is strained and rinsed, stir in a bit of olive oil, and this will eliminate sticking as well.

INGREDIENTS

2 1/2 Cups Semolina Flour
2 Eggs, plus water to make 3/4 cup
1 1/2 teaspoon salt

NOTE : If using an extruder, add 2 Tablespoons olive oil to the eggs, then add water to make 3/4 cup. The oil acts as a lubricant as it is being pushed out, and you will have much cleaner, smoother and happier pasta.

SPINACH PASTA

A really nice variation is to add chopped spinach. This has a beautiful green color, and is especially striking when served with a white sauce. Interestingly, the addition of the spinach does not significantly affect the texture of the pasta, and there is no real discernable difference in the taste.

For a full recipe, I use about 3 oz. of chopped frozen spinach. Start by thawing it, then squeeze out as much moisture as you can. Even if you bought chopped spinach, it's not chopped enough, so get out the cutting board, and chop it quite finely.

Add the spinach with all the other ingredients and mix well. You may need to add a little additional flour to counteract the moisture in the spinach.