

## Tips for perfect pasta



As far as I'm concerned, pasta has two ingredients: liquid and flour. Liquid can mean cold water, hot water, eggs, egg yolks, vegetable purée, even wine. Flour can mean soft grain flour, hard grain flour and all kinds of other flours derived from pulses, dried vegetables and spices. With a few rules of thumb, you can make a mix of liquid ingredients and a mix of dry to create a dough specifically for your dish.

## **tips for perfect pasta**

- The ratio of 50ml liquid to 100g flour is a good place to start.
- Stiffer, drier doughs are good for noodles and sheets; softer, wetter doughs are best for filled pasta shapes.
- The more egg yolks you use, the richer and shorter the dough will become. Add too many and it can make it fragile and difficult to handle.
- Hard flour (grano duro in Italian), like fine semolina, is good for dry doughs and gives you pasta with bite. Soft flours (grano tenero) like Tipo 00, are good for softer doughs.
- Flours that have low or no gluten, like chestnut, are passengers in dough, giving it no texture, just flavour. Try to never use more than 30% of a passenger flour in a dough.
- Work your dough properly before you roll it out. Roll and fold, roll and fold, until you get a nice rectangular shape and a pale, stiff sheet with lots of developed gluten strands in it. Without doing this you'll have a dough with no 'al dente' bite, no matter how briefly you cook it.
- Larger, more industrial machines make it easier to work all the dough through at one time; with a small machine, it's easier to split the dough into pieces (cover any dough with a damp tea towel when you're not using it). Work it through the biggest setting, fold the pasta over like a book, turn it 90 degrees and put it through on the thickest setting again. Flour the dough each time if it is hard to work with. After 10 or so folds, carry on working it but without folding, reducing the setting each time until you reach the thinnest one.

Now try these



### **Chilli tagliolini with crab & cherry tomatoes**

Chilli makes all the difference here. Use Turkish chilli powder if you can get it, as it adds great colour.

Serves 2

- 100g Tipo 00 flour
- 100g fine semolina flour, plus extra for dusting
- 2 eggs
- 1 tbsp Turkish chilli powder
- 200g ripe red cherry tomatoes



- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, finely sliced
- 100g good white crab meat
- ½ lemon
- A few sprigs of parsley, leaves picked

**1.** In a bowl, mix the flours, eggs and chilli powder to make a dough. Work it well with your hands, then when it all comes together, roll it out onto a surface dusted with semolina flour, not too thin. Cut into 5mm strips either by hand or with a cutter attachment for the pasta machine. Dust the strips well with semolina flour and lay out on a tray.

**2.** To make the sauce, cut the cherry tomatoes in half and squeeze the seeds into a sieve over a bowl. Discard the seeds but keep the tomato halves and the bowl of juice.

**3.** Crush the fennel seeds with a little salt in a pestle and mortar. Place a saucepan over a medium heat and add a good splash of oil. Add the garlic and fry until pale golden, then tip in the fennel seeds and the tomatoes and juice, and cook with the lid on for 1 minute, until the tomatoes soften and release more juice. Season with salt and pepper and add the crab, and warm through gently over a low heat.

**4.** Cook the pasta in boiling salted water for 2½ minutes. Drain and toss in the sauce. Taste and season with salt, pepper and a little lemon juice.

**5.** Allow the pasta to sit in the sauce until it absorbs the excess moisture, then lift into bowls with tongs. Scatter with chopped parsley and drizzle with olive oil before serving.



## **Orecchiette with yellow zucchini, pecorino & chilli**

Serves 4

- 200g fine semolina flour, plus extra for dusting

### **Sauce**

- 500g yellow zucchini
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 dried small red bird's-eye chillies
- A few sprigs of oregano

- A few sprigs of mint
- Aged pecorino, to serve

**1.** Boil the kettle, then allow to cool for 10 minutes until hot but not boiling. Pour 150ml hot water into a bowl with the flour and mix to a dough first with a knife, then when cool enough to handle, knead very well with your hands. Generously flour a small wooden chopping board and get yourself a normal dinner knife, preferably with a flexible blade. Tear small pieces – about the size of a chickpea – flour the piece well and smear across the board with the flat of the knife so they spring up into orecchiette. Place all orecchiette on a tray dusted with semolina flour and leave to cool and dry.

**2.** Cut the zucchini into very thin wedges, and place in a colander. Sprinkle with a good pinch of salt and leave to sit for half an hour. Rinse with cold running water and pat dry with a tea towel. Set aside.

**3.** Place a large saucepan over a medium heat and add a good splash of olive oil. Once hot, add the garlic and crumble in the chillies. Fry for a few seconds, until the garlic turns golden brown, then stir in the oregano. After a few seconds add the zucchini, season with pepper, and cover with a lid. Turn the heat to low, and cook for 10–15 minutes, until the zucchinis are very soft. Mash gently with a potato masher and keep warm.

**4,** Cook the pasta in plenty of boiling salted water for about 5 minutes (orecchiette rises to the top before it is cooked, unlike other pasta). Drain, reserving a mugful of cooking water.

**5.** Stir the pasta into the sauce along with a splash of olive oil, and a little of the pasta water to loosen, if needed. Spoon the pasta onto plates, and scatter with chopped mint and grated pecorino. Dust with extra dried chilli if you like a little more bite.