



in the KITCHEN

Endless **Pastabilities**

Getting buzzed on
homemade pasta

BY CAROL PENN-ROMINE
PHOTOS BY ANDY ROMINE

On April Fools' Day in the 1950s, the BBC ran a story on the pasta harvest in Switzerland, a bumper crop, it reported, due to a mild winter and the disappearance of the dreaded spaghetti weevil. (Thanks to YouTube, you can still find this gem of a prank if you go to the site and search for "spaghetti harvest.")

Ah, if only you could drift down to the farmers' market and buy some freshly harvested pasta. Or, step out your back door and pick some from the pasta tree.

Making fresh pasta is only slightly more involved than picking it would be. And fresh pasta has its bonuses: It's far better than dried, boxed pasta; it's fun to make in a group; and it allows almost endless creativity. Whether you have a snazzy pasta-making attachment for your monolithic stand mixer, a hand-crank pasta maker, or a rolling pin and a knife, you can turn out fresh pasta with very few ingredients and just a little time and effort. And when you've gone to the trouble of making a lovely pasta sauce, why would you pour it over dry, store-bought noodles that taste no better than the box in which they came? Fresh pasta has both flavor and texture on its side, so why not give it a whirl?

Getting Down to Business

Before you begin, here are a few things to keep in mind.

All-purpose flour works best for making basic pasta dough and for those doughs that call for a combination of regular flour and another flour, like whole wheat or semolina. Bread flour contains more protein than all-purpose; therefore, kneading dough made with bread flour builds more gluten, which gives bread great structure but makes pasta too tough. By the way, if you've picked up a bag of 00 flour in an Italian market and want to know what to do with it, just use it like you would all-purpose flour (Italian 0 flour is the equivalent of bread flour).

Set the eggs out 30 minutes before you mix the dough. The ingredients incorporate much more easily when the eggs aren't too cold.

Technically, pasta doesn't have eggs in it. Noodles do, either whole eggs or just the yolks. But most people use the terms "pasta" and "noodles" interchangeably without harm to human or beast, so I certainly won't split hairs. Eggs give the dough strength (for a more durable ravioli that is less likely to fall apart), as well as added nutritional value. Even a generous serving of pasta will have

only about half of a yolk in it, so if you opt for a red sauce over a cream sauce, you're still consuming very little cholesterol.

The basic procedure for making pasta dough is to begin by sifting flour(s) and salt into a mound on a cutting board or other clean work surface. Make a well in the mound with your fingers and into the well put the egg and the oil. Using a fork, begin stirring the wet ingredients, gradually drawing in the surrounding flour and mixing until it becomes thick enough to abandon the fork and continue by hand. Knead it just until the dough comes together, adding water by the teaspoonful. Too much water will make the dough gummy, which will clog the pasta maker and cause you to use excessive bad language. Wrap the dough in a sheet of plastic wrap and park it in the fridge for 30 minutes or so to allow the dry ingredients to absorb the wet. While your dough gets ready for its debut, you can enjoy a glass of wine and a little antipasto, or put the finishing touches on the sauce.

When it comes to rolling out and cutting the pasta, follow the instructions that came with your pasta maker. If you want a different size and shape than your maker can cut, fold the sheets of pasta into sections about four inches

After you've rolled out and cut the pasta, you're practically ready to tuck the napkin into your collar.



Left: Measure
Right: Eggs in the
flour well
Opposite: Pasta
dough cut to size
in a hand-crank
machine



Whisk eggs and liquid into flour to form a dough



Continue to mix dough by hand



Dough is ready to "rest" before rolling

long and cut the width of noodle you need with a knife. Or use those sheets to make ravioli or lasagna. Toss the cut pasta with a little flour to keep it from sticking together.

Know why pasta pots are so large? Because pasta cooks best when it isn't crowded. Fill a large pot with water and give your pasta plenty of room to do its thing. Add salt to the water to boost the flavor in preparation for the sauce, but don't add oil to the water. Oil makes the pasta slippery and prevents the sauce from adhering. The same thing will happen if you rinse it after cooking. The starch on the pasta gives it traction.

Be sure the water is boiling when you begin rolling and cutting the dough. This way it doesn't dry out or glue itself into a mass while the water heats.

After you've rolled out and cut the pasta, you're practically ready to tuck the napkin into your collar. Fresh pasta takes almost no

time to cook, so be sure your sauce is made and everyone is about to gather. Within two to three minutes of that fresh pasta hitting the boiling water, it will be ready to eat.

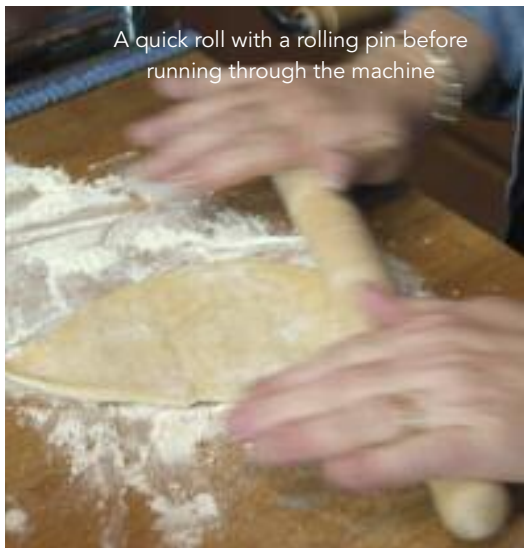
Regarding the old throw-it-against-the-wall-to-see-if-it's-done trick: Your mouth knows better when the pasta is cooked sufficiently than the wall does. So whether you're making fresh pasta or boiling a box of the dried stuff, fish a piece out of the pot and sample it yourself to see if it's cooked to your liking.

As with most activities, making pasta becomes faster and easier — and the results better — through practice. The basic ingredients — a handful of flour, an egg, a dash of salt and a splash of oil — cost so little that if you botch the first few attempts, it's no big deal. Once you've learned to make a nice batch of fresh pasta, you'll find yourself turning up your nose at the dried, boxed stuff. And by then, you'll have become such

a pro at making your own pasta that you'll be able to do it without a second thought.

So what will you do with the dried pasta that's now languishing in your pantry? Do what you probably did with it when you were a kid. Long before I realized that dried pasta was a food, I used it for building materials. Remember gluing noodles to a cigar box and then spray-painting it gold? Yeah. Something like that. I'd say it's the perfect place to store your fresh pasta recipes. 📌

West Tennessee native Carol Penn-Romine is a chef and food writer based in Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in *Best Food Writing 2013*, *Leite's Culinaria*, *Gastronomica*, *Cornbread Nation IV: The Best of Southern Food Writing*, and *Christian Science Monitor*. You can read about her culinary adventures at www.hungrypassport.com.



A quick roll with a rolling pin before running through the machine



Each pass through the machine rolls the dough thinner



The thin sheet of dough is ready to cut

Pasta By the Handful

The first two recipes are for modest portions. Each will yield enough pasta for two entrées. It's easy to do the math, doubling or tripling the amounts for a family or dinner party. If you have four people for dinner, let two people make a handful of dough each. Then those who didn't make the dough can roll it out and cut it. The cornmeal dough recipe makes enough for about four portions.

BASIC PASTA DOUGH

This is a good, everyday pasta dough. If you want to make it a whole-wheat dough, cut back to a half cup of all-purpose flour and add a half cup of whole-wheat flour. Cooking time for the basic dough is about 2 to 3 minutes; for whole wheat, about 3 to 4 minutes.

1 cup all-purpose flour
a pinch of salt
1 large egg
1 teaspoon oil
water as needed (about 1¼ to 1½ teaspoons; for whole wheat, about 3 teaspoons)

SEMOLINA PASTA DOUGH

Semolina is made of durum wheat, which is a hard, protein-rich wheat. In spite of its increased heft, it requires no more time to cook than basic pasta dough, about 2 to 3 minutes. Semolina yields a more durable dough without being chewy. It's good for supporting heavier sauces and for making stuffed pasta, like ravioli and tortellini.

½ cup all-purpose flour
½ cup semolina
a pinch of salt
1 large egg
1 teaspoon oil
water as needed (about 3 to 4 teaspoons)

CORNMEAL PASTA DOUGH

This departure from basic dough provides the base for an amusing take on the classic Southern combo of shrimp and grits. Cooking time is about 3 to 4 minutes.

1 cup all-purpose flour
½ cup finely ground cornmeal, your preference of yellow or white
a pinch of salt
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon olive oil
water, as needed (about 2 to 3 teaspoons)

Matching the Right Pasta with the Right Sauce

If you're in the mood for pasta with pesto or maybe just a little olive oil and a grating of fresh parmigiano reggiano, you'll want to use angel hair, spaghetti, or vermicelli, which are too delicate for heavier sauces.

Wider, flatter noodles like fettuccine and linguine work well with creamy sauces.

Even wider noodles like tagliatelle and pappardelle and textured noodles can accommodate chunky sauces just fine.

All those types of noodles that look like little shells, bowties and radiators (that one is actually called radiatori!) are made to catch the sauce and cheese in their nooks and crannies.

April 11: Fresh Pasta Making, 6–9 PM L'ecole Culinaire, \$95

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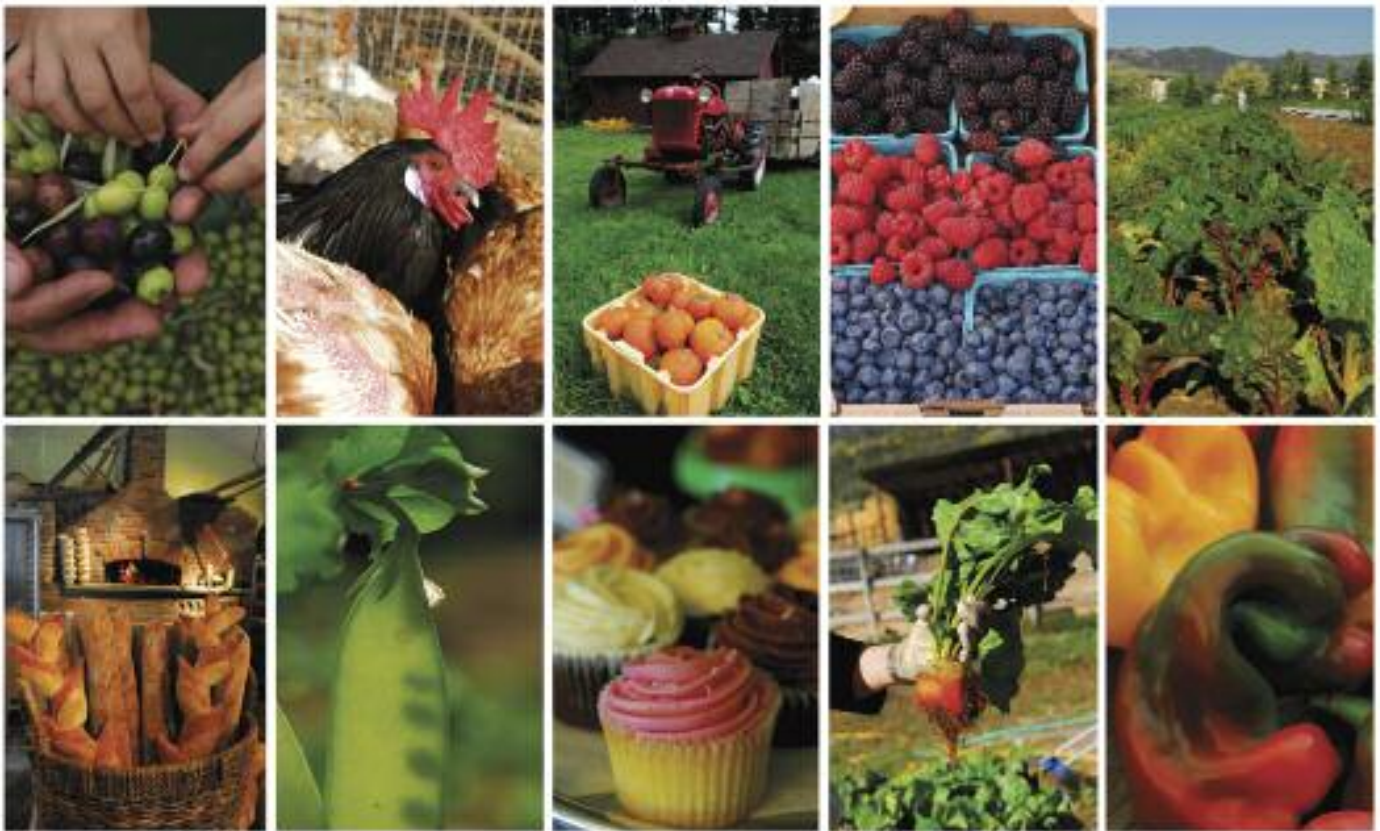
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LEMONY SHRIMP AND GRITS PASTA

Recipe by Carol Penn-Romine

Makes about 4 servings



- 1 pound raw medium shrimp, shells on
- ½ cup shrimp stock, which you'll make from the shells
- ½ cup heavy whipping cream
- 3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- zest of one lemon
- ¼ cup fresh chives, chopped
- salt and black pepper, to taste
- ½ cup freshly grated parmigiano reggiano

Remove shells and dark veins from shrimp, discard veins, and make a quick stock from the shells (see below).

In the medium sauce pan you used to make the stock, heat the stock, cream, and lemon juice. Simmer gently for 5 minutes. Add the shrimp to the simmering lemon cream sauce. Stir well and season lightly with salt and black pepper. Let shrimp cook for about 4 to 5 minutes.

Pour cooked, strained cornmeal pasta (see page 27) into a large serving bowl. Pour the shrimp and its sauce over the pasta (don't worry if the sauce seems thin — the pasta will absorb it). Sprinkle on the lemon zest, chives, and half of the parmigiano-reggiano, and toss to combine. Add an extra splash of stock if needed to make the sauce. Season to taste with salt and black pepper. Garnish with remaining cheese.

Quick Shrimp Stock Tutorial: It's less expensive to buy shrimp with the shells on, and you get more for your money, because you can make a quick stock out of those shells that give you a much tastier dish. Here's how to do it: Melt a tablespoon of unsalted butter in a medium sauce pan over medium-low heat. Add the shells from your pound of shrimp to the pan and toss to coat with butter. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring, so they don't stick to the pan. Add a cup of water and a half cup of dry white wine to the shells. Bring to a simmer, stirring and pressing down on the shells with a spatula to get all of the flavor you can from them. Simmer for about 5 minutes. Pour through a strainer into a glass bowl or measuring cup and press down on the shells to get every last drop of stock from them. You won't need all of this stock for this recipe, but you can freeze the rest for future use in a soup or sauce.

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