

Cooking Pasta and Noodles

PASTA is a type of Italian food typically made from an unleavened dough of durum wheat flour (semolina) mixed with water or eggs, and formed into sheets or various shapes, then cooked by boiling or baking. Pastas are divided into two broad categories: dried pasta and fresh pasta. Most dried pasta is produced commercially via an extrusion process, although it can be done at home. Fresh pasta is



traditionally produced by hand, sometimes with the aid of simple machines. Fresh pastas available in the grocery stores are produced commercially by large-scale machines. Both dried and fresh pastas come in a number of shapes and varieties. In Italy, the names of specific pasta shapes or types often vary by locale. Common forms of pasta include long and short tubes, flat shapes or sheets, miniature shapes for soup, those that are meant to be stuffed, and specialty or decorative shapes.

Objective:



Describe the variations of pasta.

Key Terms:



al dente

capellini

egg noodles

elbow macaroni

farfalle

fettuccini

lasagna

linguine

manicotti

pasta

semolina flour

spaghetti

spaghettini

Pasta

TYPES OF PASTA

Pasta is one of the easiest and most versatile food products used today. It is available in a variety of sizes, shapes, colors and flavors. **Pasta** is a starchy food product that is made from grains. It is considered a staple in many kitchens. Pasta increases in volume as it cooks and yields a high profit. Pasta is a very popular menu choice. To create successful pasta dishes, you need to become familiar with the varieties of pasta available and how to prepare them. Pasta can be used in place of other starchy foods in a meal.

One of the main ingredients of pasta is flour. Usually, wheat flour is used. The other main ingredients in pasta is a liquid, such as water or eggs. Oil is sometimes added to pasta dough to give it a richer texture. Most commercial dried pastas are made from **semolina flour**, a hard-grain wheat flour that is high in the proteins that form gluten. Semolina flour produces a smooth dough and creamy yellow color.

There are more than 100 varieties of pasta available in a number of shapes, sizes, and flavors. A pasta's color reflects its flavor. You can buy pasta dried or fresh, but fresh pasta cooks faster. Here are some common pasta shapes:

- ◆ **Elbow macaroni** are curved, narrow tubes that are short in length. They are used baked, for macaroni and cheese, macaroni salad, and casseroles.
- ◆ **Spaghetti** consists of thin, round strands. Very thin spaghetti is called **spaghettini**. Spaghetti is boiled, and served with meat or tomato sauce, oil, butter or thin sauces.
- ◆ **Egg noodles** are long or short ribbons with spinach, tomato, or



FIGURE 1. Fresh pasta is prepared using semolina flour, water or eggs and oil. A smooth dough with a creamy yellow color is produced.



FIGURE 2. While egg noodles are not as common as spaghetti or fettuccine, they are still a very common type of pasta. Egg noodles are used in various dishes, such as, beef stroganoff and homemade chicken noodle soup.

other flavorings that are added to the dough. Egg noodles are baked into casseroles, some sauces and puddings.

- ◆ **Lasagne** are wide, flat noodles that have rippled edges. They are used baked as a layered casserole with tomato sauce, cheese and meat or seafood.
- ◆ **Capellini**/Angel Hair is a fine, solid, strand like pasta that is thinner than spaghetti. Capellini is boiled and used with thin sauces, seafood, tomatoes, garlic or in soups.
- ◆ **Linguine** is thin, flattened spaghetti that is about 1/8-inch wide. It is boiled, and often served with clam sauce, marinara sauce, and seafood.
- ◆ **Farfalle** are flat, wide noodles that are squeezed in the center to resemble bow ties before they are dried. Farfalle are boiled, or baked with artichokes or seafood. With farfalle, you would use medium or rich sauces with meat or vegetables.
- ◆ **Fettuccini** are flat, long 1/4-inch wide noodles. They are best boiled and served with reach cream sauces, such as alfredo, or meat sauces that adhere well to these ribbon-like noodles.
- ◆ **Manicotti** are medium-size hollow tubes, cut straight or angled. They are stuffed with cheese, meat, seafood or vegetables, and baked.



FIGURE 3. Farfalle noodles are commonly called bowtie noodles. Farfalle are formed from a rectangle or oval pasta, with two of the sides trimmed to a ruffled edge and the center pinched together to make the unusual shape.

The shape of some pastas makes them ideal for certain sauces. For example, a thinner, tomato-based sauce like marinara is ideal for angel hair pasta, while alfredo sauce adheres well to fettuccini.

QUALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF PASTA

FLOUR: Semolina, a high protein flour, produces the best dry pasta. Dry pasta should contain 100% semolina flour.

FRESHNESS: Dry pasta should be hard and brittle. It should snap cleanly instead of bending easily.

PURCHASING AND STORAGE OF PASTA

Both dried and fresh pasta usually are purchased by weight. Dried pasta is available in 1, 5 and 10-pound bags and boxes. Twenty bulk cases are also common. Fresh pasta can be purchased in 1 to 2-pound boxes, or frozen in 10 to 20-pound cases. Fresh pasta is also available in bags or cartons.

DRIED PASTA: Dried pastas, often purchased in bags or boxes, are available in tube, flat and shaped forms. Tubes and shaped pastas are generally not available fresh. Dried pastas should be brittle and should break easily. The surface should look dull or be marked by small pits or scars. Sauces cannot soak into smooth, shiny, dried pastas. Dried pasta comes in a variety of interesting and unusual flavors. Besides the typical spinach, tomato, and plain pastas, you can also get a variety of combination flavors, such as tomato-dill, spinach-herb, or carrot-ginger. Dried pasta can be stored in a cool, dry place for several months.

FRESH PASTA: Fresh pasta can be made in the kitchen. However, it requires a great deal of labor, or hard work, to produce. It is also difficult to get a consistent product. Fresh pasta can be purchased fresh or frozen. Fresh pasta also comes in a variety of flavors, such as spinach, tomato-garlic, and whole-wheat. Fresh pasta must be tightly wrapped and kept refrigerated to prevent its drying out. Even when refrigerated, fresh pasta should be used within a few days after it has been made. It can also be kept in the freezer to be used within a few weeks.

COOKING PASTA

Cooking pasta is a simple process. However, you will need to be familiar with the recipe. Some pasta dishes require the pasta to be fully cooked. Other recipes require pasta to be partially cooked and added to a casserole along with a variety of other ingredients. Pasta can be boiled or baked. Boiling pasta is a simple process. Both fresh and dried pasta can be boiled.

BOILING PASTA: When boiling pasta, you need to use enough water to cook it properly. Pasta can be cooked when a customer orders it. It also can be cooked in large amounts ahead of time. Dried pasta is sometimes cooked ahead of time. Fresh pasta is not because it cooks quickly and becomes too soft.



FIGURE 4. Boiling pasta is the most common method for cooking pasta. It is important to remember to use enough water to cook it properly. Recommendations are 4 to 6 quarts of water per pound of pasta.



BROADENING AWARENESS...

AMAZING ASPECTS: The Macaroni Myth

The popular myth holds that noodles were first invented in China and discovered there by the Venetian explorer Marco Polo during the 13th century. He introduced the food to Italy and from there the rest of Europe. Although there is little doubt that the Chinese were making noodles by the first century A.D. it is now equally clear that they were not alone. Middle Eastern and Italian cooks were preparing macaroni long before Marco Polo's adventures. Pasta's current popularity dates from the 18th century, when mass production by machine began in Naples, Italy. Pasta became a staple of the American middle-class diet following the wave of Italian immigrants in the late 19th century. During the 1980s pasta became global. Restaurants began serving it in ways previously unimagined. Corner grocery stores and local grocery stores began offering at least a dozen different shapes, often fresh and sometimes flavored. Dedicated cooks began to make pasta from scratch, though they sometimes tossed it with bottled sauce. Many also became interested in Asian noodles. Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Thai restaurants expanded their menu offerings to include traditional noodle dishes. Pasta's popularity continues to grow as chefs discover the versatility of this inexpensive, nutritious food.

BAKING PASTA: When pasta is baked with a filling and a sauce, or simply a sauce, the flavors blend during the baking process. You cannot achieve, or do, this simply by adding a sauce to the top of plain cooked pasta. Some types of pasta, such as lasagna noodles, are cooked and then layered in a casserole with other ingredients such as cheese, meat, spinach, and tomato sauce for a hearty, baked dish. Manicotti and cannelloni are stuffed with a filling such as cheese and covered in sauce. Macaroni and cheese is also a baked pasta dish.

DETERMINE DONENESS: When cooking Italian-style pasta, cook it **al dente**, or "to the bite", meaning that the pasta is tender, but still firm. If pasta is cooked past the stage at which it is tender but still firm when bitten into, it quickly becomes soft and mushy. Each type of pasta has a different cooking time. If pasta is overcooked or undercooked, the dish being prepared could be ruined. The amount of water, the altitude, and various other factors can affect the cooking time. It is important to check pasta carefully to stop the cooking process at the



FIGURE 5. Pasta is cooked until it is al dente, or tender but firm. If pasta is cooked past this stage, it will quickly become soft and mushy.

al dente stage. To check for doneness, you can bite into a piece of pasta. If it is tender, but still firm, remove it from the heat and drain carefully. Another alternative is to cut through a piece of pasta with a fork. If it cuts easily, it is done.

STUFFING PASTA: Once cooked, some pasta can be stuffed with ingredients. Tubular pastas, such as manicotti or cannelloni, are usually stuffed. Ravioli are stuffed squares, rounds, or triangles. A variety of other pasta shapes can be stuffed too. The filling ingredients may include cheese, meat, seafood, poultry, or vegetables. The fillings, with the exception of meat, can be cooked or uncooked. Meat fillings, however, must be completely cooked before being stuffed into the pasta. This is because the time it takes the pasta to cook may not be sufficient to cook the meat safely. Some large tubular pastas, such as cannelloni and manicotti, are often only partly cooked in boiling water. They are then stuffed with a filling and covered in a sauce. These dishes are baked as casseroles to finish the cooking process. When you partially cook pasta, make sure it does not become overcooked. It will continue to cook during baking.



FIGURE 6. Some forms of pasta can be stuffed with various ingredients. Tubular pasta, as well as shells can be stuffed with fillings like meat, cheeses, seafood, poultry and/or vegetables.

Summary:



Pasta is an extremely versatile food, that can be cooked fresh while the dough is still moist and pliable, or the dough can be allowed to dry completely before cooking. Pasta can be filled or sauced in an endless variety of ways. It can stand alone or be used in salads, desserts, soups or casseroles. Pasta is widely used in the cuisines of Asia, North America, and Europe. In Italy, pasta dishes are usually served as a separate course, often referred to as the minestre or soup of a meal. In other European countries, Asia and the United States, pasta dishes may be served as an appetizer, entrée or side dish.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Describe the main ingredients in fresh and dried pasta.
2. Differentiate between spaghetti and spaghetti.
3. How can pasta be purchased?

4. Describe the various ways pasta can be cooked.
5. How is pasta's doneness determined?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



A dumpling is considered a form of pasta. A dumpling is a small mound of dough cooked by steaming or simmering in a flavorful liquid. Dumplings are found in many cuisines: Italian gnocchi, Jewish matzo balls, German spaetzli, Chinese wontons and Polish pierogi. Dumplings can be sweet or savory, plain or filled. Plain or drop dumplings are made with a beadlike dough, often leavened with yeast or chemical leavening agents. They should be light and tender, but firm enough to hold their shape when cooked. Drop dumplings may be served with stews or broths, or coated with butter or sauce as an appetizer or side dish. Filled dumplings are made by wrapping noodle dough around seasoned meat, vegetables, cheese or fruit. These parcels are then steamed, fried or baked and served as a snack food, appetizer or side dish.

Web Links:



How to Make 29 Handmade Pasta Shapes with 4 Types of Dough

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ew-3-8itpjc>

The Art of Making Noodles by Hand

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2kesmAO8VU>

How to Make Egg Pasta

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_fu5RaXMVk

How to Dry Fresh Pasta for Future Use

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpIBAR_7NRY

Tortellini

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rkllmk-uSnU>