Pasta Basics

Quick · Serves 4

Ken's note: TBD

How to cook pasta right, and a few classic sauces that take about as long as the water takes to boil.

Ingredients

Cooking it right

- 1 lb dried pasta
- 4–5 quarts water
- 2 Tbsp kosher salt (the water should taste like the sea)

Method

1. Bring the water to a full boil, add the salt, then the pasta. Stir for the first minute so it doesn't stick. Don't add oil. Cook to 1–2 minutes short of the package time, then taste: it should be firm to the bite (al dente).
2. **Save a cup of the cooking water** before draining. The starchy water makes sauce cling and loosens it without watering it down. Drain (don't rinse), then finish the pasta in the sauce pan for 1–2 minutes with a splash of the water, tossing until glossy.
3. **Pairing:** thin sauces (oil, butter, lemon) go with long thin pasta; chunky sauces with short shapes (penne, rigatoni); baked dishes with lasagna or ziti.

Notes

Classic sauces

- **Marinara:** see Marinara in Sauces. Add a splash of cream for a pink sauce.
- **Aglio e olio:** warm ⅓ cup olive oil with 5–6 sliced garlic cloves and ½ tsp red pepper flakes until the garlic is pale gold. Toss with the pasta, ½ cup pasta water, and chopped parsley. Finish with Parmesan.
- **Cacio e pepe:** see Cacio e Pepe (Pecorino, black pepper, and pasta water).
- **Alfredo:** see Fettuccine Alfredo (butter, Parmesan, and a little cream).
- **Butter and Parmesan:** toss the pasta with 4 Tbsp butter, a splash of pasta water, and 1 cup grated Parmesan and black pepper.
- **Pesto:** see Basil Pesto in Sauces; thin with pasta water.
- **Lemon butter:** see Lemon Butter Sauce in Sauces.
- **Carbonara:** see Spaghetti Carbonara.
- **Meat sauce:** see Bolognese.
- **Baked:** see Sausage, Cheese, and Basil Lasagna.
- **Meatballs:** see Italian Meatballs.