

Pasta perfetto!

Pep up classic Italian dishes with interesting additions and flavour combinations and add a sprinkle of magic to your weekly repertoire

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Pasta is one of the world's favourite foods because it's delicious, nutritious and versatile. Enjoyed as a main course or side dish, hot or cold, a plate of pasta is one of the most satisfying comfort foods there is.

Whether your preference is for spaghetti, lasagne or penne, you'll find plenty of inspiration in Italian-born Laura Santini's book, *Pasta Perfect*. Laura believes the heart and soul of every dish is in the sauce. We've focused on traditional, family-friendly tomato sauces and making our own pasta, but also try creamy 'Ricotta, green olive and basil', punchy 'Smoked mackerel and pink pepper' or, for something a little bit fancier, 'Truffle mac 'n' cheese'. As the Italians say, 'mangiamo'; let's eat!

ARRABBIATA

This is a simple tomato sauce with a kick of heat – the spice both exhilarating and moreish. An easy recipe for a quick weeknight meal, topped here with ricotta and aubergine curls.

SERVES 4-6

- Extra virgin olive oil
- 3 garlic cloves, squashed, peeled and halved lengthways
- 900g cherry tomatoes, halved
- 2 fresh red chillies, deseeded and cut into half-moons
- ½ tsp dried chilli flakes
- Handful of fresh basil, roughly torn, plus extra to serve
- 1 tsp sugar
- 400-600g dried pasta or 320-480g fresh pasta
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Finely grated Parmesan, to serve (optional)

TASTY TOPPER

- 2 large aubergines
- ½ tbsp salt
- Olive oil
- Crumbled ricotta

1 Heat 5mm oil in a large non-stick frying pan.

Toss in the garlic and cook, stirring, to flavour the oil. As the garlic begins to colour, add the tomatoes, chillies, dried chilli flakes, basil and sugar, then season with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

2 Cook over a low heat for 10-15 minutes, until the tomatoes have broken down, but not totally.

3 Meanwhile, for the topper, slice the skin from the aubergine 1 cm deep all around. Discard the pulpy core. Cut the skin into 1cm-wide matchsticks. Put in a colander, sprinkle with salt and squash with a heavy bowl for 30 minutes.

4 Drain and rinse the aubergine well. Squeeze out all the water with your hands and pat dry with paper towels.

5 Heat 2.5cm oil in a pot suitable for shallow-frying – check if it is hot with the end of an aubergine matchstick

to see if it sizzles.

6 Add the aubergine matchsticks and fry, stirring, until golden brown and slightly curled.

7 Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on a few pieces of paper towel to absorb any excess oil.

8 Cook the pasta in plenty of boiling salted water, according to the packet instructions.

9 Drain the pasta but keep a cup of the cooking water. Tip the pasta back into the pan, add the spicy cherry tomato sauce and toss over a high heat, until the pasta looks creamy and well coated. Add a splash of the retained cooking water to loosen, if needed.

10 Serve, topped with crumbled ricotta, the crispy aubergine curls, extra basil and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil. Serve with extra black pepper and grated Parmesan cheese if it makes you happy!



Classic dough for pasta

This easy recipe comes from Emilia-Romagna, the pasta-making capital of Italy – so it must be good!

SERVES 4-6

- 500g type 00 flour, plus extra for dusting
- ½ tsp salt
- 5 free-range eggs (the rule is 1 egg for every 100g flour)

1 Sift the flour into a mound on a clean work surface. Make a well in the centre, add salt and crack in the eggs, one by one.

2 Use a fork or your fingertips to beat the eggs lightly in the centre of the well, drawing in the flour a little at a time. If too wet, add a bit more flour; if too dry, add a drop of water.

3 When combined, knead

together into a large ball of dough. It will look smooth, more like pastry than bread. Wrap in cling film and leave to rest in a cool place for 15-30 minutes.

4 Once the dough has rested, if working by hand, lightly flour a rolling pin and get rolling until you've reached the desired thickness for your chosen shape. Roll either by hand or through a pasta machine until thin, then cut into the required shape. If using a pasta machine, follow the machine instructions.

5 Work with one quarter of the dough at a time to make it more manageable.

Classic red sauce

Make your own sauce with fresh ingredients bursting with goodness. It's a classic for a reason, so do it well!

SERVES 4-6

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 Spanish onion, finely chopped
- 1 carrot, finely diced
- 1 celery stick, finely diced
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp tomato puree

- 2 x 400g cans chopped tomatoes, or whole San Marzano tomatoes
- Large handful of fresh basil leaves, torn
- 1 tsp sugar
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 Heat the oil in a large heavy-bottomed pan. Add the onion, carrot, celery and garlic, and sauté until the onions are glassy and softened. Add the puree and canned tomatoes. If you're using whole tomatoes, squash them as they go in to break them up.

2 Add the torn basil leaves and sugar. Season with salt

and black pepper to taste.

3 Cook over a very low heat, stirring frequently to avoid sticking, for 40-60 minutes, or until the vegetables have softened and the sauce is rich, tangy and tasty, and the oil has separated on the surface.

4 You can leave it chunky or pass it through a fine sieve to remove any chunks and seeds.



ONE-POT PASTA

Simply throw all the ingredients in a pot or pan and watch dinner come together.

SERVES 4

- 350g linguine or spaghetti
- 350g cherry tomatoes, halved or quartered
- 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ¼ tsp dried chilli flakes
- 4 anchovy fillets (optional, if not using, add an extra tsp of salt)
- Large handful of basil leaves
- 2 tbsp capers, drained and rinsed
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 4 tbsp grated Parmesan cheese, to serve

1 Place all the ingredients (except the Parmesan) in the bottom of a pan that is large enough for the pasta to go in whole.

2 Add 850ml water and bring to the boil over a high heat. Stir frequently, until the pasta is al dente and the water has almost evaporated (about 9 minutes).

3 Adjust the seasoning to taste and serve immediately with the Parmesan sprinkled over.



Reader offer

Psychologies readers can buy a copy of *Pasta Perfect* for the special price of £10 (RRP £14.99), plus free UK p&p. To order, go to rylandpeters.com and use the code 'PSYCHPASTA' at checkout. Offer valid until 10 July 2020.

QUICK AND DELECTABLE RAGU

Loaded with umami flavours, the seared meat, concentrated tomato puree, wine and garlic in this dish combine to create a ragu like no other. Be careful not to eat it all while tasting for seasoning!

SERVES 4

- 5 tbsp olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, peeled, squashed and halved lengthways
- 1 onion, sliced into 8 wedges
- 500g minced beef
- 1 large bay leaf
- 3 tbsp tomato puree
- 125ml red or white wine
- 600g boodles (butternut squash noodles; spiralsised at home or shop-bought), or 600g dried pasta or 320-480g fresh pasta
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Parmesan shavings, to serve

1 Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed pan. Add the garlic and onion wedges. When these are sizzling, add the meat and seal it over a moderate to high heat, until well browned all over.

2 Season with salt and black pepper and add the bay leaf and tomato puree. Cook on a low heat, stirring regularly to prevent the bottom burning, until the oil begins to separate from the sauce.

3 Add the wine to the sauce and cook for a further 5 minutes, or until the wine has been absorbed.

4 Towards the end of the cooking

time, cook the boodles or the pasta, according to the packet instructions.

5 Serve the quick ragu with the cooked, drained pasta or boodles and top with Parmesan shavings, plus plenty of extra black pepper.

Tasty transformation

For a juicy bolognese, add two 400g cans of chopped tomatoes and a pinch of dried oregano. Or, better still, add enough 'Classic red sauce' (see recipe, opposite) to give the consistency required. A quality tomato pasta sauce from a jar could also be added with excellent results.

