

## PASTA, PASTA, PASTA

Pasta is one of the most widely used products in today's kitchens. Here are some tips to help you enjoy this versatile food product.

Use lots of water when boiling any pasta. It helps keep the pieces separated and evenly cooked. A pinch (1/4 tsp. or so) of salt will add flavor to the pasta as well as raise the boiling temperature of the water enough to speed up the softening of the pasta. If you are watching your salt intake, use a teaspoon or so of lemon juice (a quick squirt from one of those plastic lemons will do).

Cooking times for dry pasta generally vary between 3 to 10 minutes. A good estimate for timing is the longer the pasta – the longer the time. For very thin spaghetti (angle hair) 2-3 minutes – for lasagna noodles, 10 minutes.

Cooking times for fresh pasta (homemade or refrigerated) take much less time. Follow package directions

Al dente is an Italian phrase meaning “**to the tooth.**” Literally al dente means “Just right.” When referring to pasta this means not too soft...not too hard.

When draining the pasta, do not rinse with water, this will wash away the starch and some of the nutrients, as well as glossing the surface, which reduces the ability of the sauce to adhere to the pasta. Accordingly, do not let the pasta sit long in the colander or strainer as it will stick together. Be ready to add the drained pasta directly to your sauce and serve at once. If you have to hold the cooked pasta for longer than 5 minutes - drain the pasta water through a colander into another pot or a sink with drain closed. Then place the colander over the hot water (pasta not touching the water) and place a cover over all to hold in the heat. If not using the pasta till later in the day or even the next day, sprinkle it with a little olive oil, toss, then store in a zip-type plastic bag until you are ready to use it.

Measuring servings the old fashioned way - For long pastas like spaghetti, grab a bunch between your thumb and forefinger. If it is as big around as a soda bottle cap – 1 serving; standard spice jar lid – 4 services (1/2 box); whole box (1 lb.) – 7 – 8 servings. When estimating egg noodles or pasta pieces like shells, ziti or rigatoni; one large handful of dry pasta = one cooked serving. Again one box (1 lb.) equals about 8 servings.

There you have it. As Lidia Bastianich says, “Tutti a tavola a mangiare” ...lets all go to the table and eat.

*Chef Cal*

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