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Flavorful Pasta

Creating flavored pasta isn't as hard as you think



Story by **Melanie Wolkoff Wachsman**
Photos by **Josh Keown**

Flour, eggs, oil, and salt — such simple ingredients create an assortment of pastas. Why stop there? Enhancing pasta with vegetable purées, citrus zest, herbs, spices — even wine — creates unique flavor profiles, colors and pairing possibilities, not to mention, menu interest for diners.

At Mangia Ristorante & Pizzeria, Lafayette, California, owner Chris Frumentti purchases fresh spinach pasta sheets for lasagna primavera (spinach pasta layered with marinated mushrooms, spinach, mozzarella, Parmigiano, ricotta and marinara). Spinach fettuccine is featured in the Prawns Sicilia dish, which pairs imported tiger prawns sautéed with garlic, sundried tomatoes, zucchini and yellow squash in a cream sauce. While Frumentti admits \$13 spinach pasta sheets are more expensive than \$10 egg pasta sheets, he wouldn't trade the diversity spinach pasta adds to his menu. "We have a lot of vegetarians in the Bay area and a dish like lasagna primavera is an option for them. It's very popular," he says.

Sure, dried and frozen flavored pastas are easy to purchase, but operators should consider preparing their own fresh flavored pasta. Giovanni Scappin,

C.H.E., assistant professor at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y., chef/owner, Cucina, Woodstock, New York, and co-author with Vincenzo Lauria of *A Tavola! Recipes and Reflections on Traditional Italian Home Cooking* (Lebhar-Friedman, 2009) says using flavored flour, where vegetables such as beets and mushrooms are dehydrated, pulverized and mixed with all-purpose flour, is the most practical way to make flavored pastas. Operators may also purchase dehydrated vegetables such as peas or carrots and create their own flavored flour, using a ratio of ¼ flavored flour with ¾ all-purpose flour.

Another option is to create vegetable purées. Build spinach pasta by blanching spinach, then purée until it becomes a liquid and add it to pasta dough. Keep in mind that adding too much purée will cause the pasta to fall apart. Make sure to incorporate flour in overly soft pasta dough. Don't stop there. Add pulverized basil to dough and serve basil pasta with an olive oil/caper sauce. Cook butternut squash with shallots, onion and herbs. Then purée and add it to dough. "Butternut squash won't give the pasta a lot of color or flavor, so I would also add it into the sauce," says Scappin. Make a bold statement by cooking pasta in red wine and pairing it with pecorino and beef sauce. "Cook the pasta a few minutes less than the directions say.

While it's really hot, pick it up from the water and place it in a hot sauté pan, gradually adding wine. Cook it until the wine completely absorbs into the pasta, making it very red and flavorful," says Scappin.

Adventurous operators can follow the lead of Azita Bina-Seibel, chef, at Bina Osteria in Boston, who pairs squid ink spaghetti with calamari, celery pesto and tomato confit.

Bina-Seibel says just four ingredients: water, salt, semolina and fresh squid ink from Spain make up the pasta. All are mixed in a dough mixer and put through the in-house pasta machine. This dish is the third top-selling first course dish.

Always remember pasta sauces should complement pasta shapes and textures. Hearty ragùs require sturdy shapes like penne. While smooth olive oil based sauces like pesto benefit from thin strands like linguine that are easily coated. Long wide ribbon pastas like fettuccine go great with butter or cream-based sauces. ♦

Melanie Wolkoff Wachsman is a freelance writer in Louisville, Kentucky. She covers food, business and lifestyle trends.

Pasta Basics

According to cookbook author Giovanni Scappin, C.H.E., who is also assistant professor at the Culinary Institute of America and chef/owner of Cucina in Woodstock, N.Y., all that's needed for fresh pasta is flour, eggs, salt, flavoring ingredients and sometimes oil and water. Just combine flour and salt in a bowl and create a well in the center. Then place eggs, flavoring ingredients and oil in the well. Using a fork, incorporate the flour into the wet ingredients. (Adjust the consistency

with flour or water.) Place the dough on a floured surface and evenly knead it until its texture becomes smooth and elastic. Divide the dough into balls and let it rest at room temperature for at least 30 minutes. Then lightly flour a work surface to prevent dough from sticking and flatten it using a rolling pin. When dough reaches desired thinness cut it into sheets, then pasta shapes.

To make large batches of dough, fit a stand mixer with the dough hook attachment. Mix the ingredients mentioned above at a low speed, until

dough is moistened. Then increase the speed to medium and knead dough until it forms a smooth ball. Let the dough relax. Cut off a piece of dough, flatten it and fold into thirds. (Cover remaining dough to keep from drying.) Set the mixer's rollers to the widest opening and guide the dough through the machine as you turn the handle. Pass the dough through the widest setting two to three times. Repeat, and narrow the setting until reaching the desired thinness. (Lightly dust the dough with flour each time.) Then cut the sheets into desired pasta shapes.