

Perfect Pasta



SCHOOL CONNECTION

Children should have access to healthy food and be able to make healthy food choices wherever they are – at home, in school, and in the community. Improving the health of the nation’s children and reversing the childhood obesity epidemic is a shared responsibility and will take the commitment of parents, the foodservice industry, the media, and schools working together. The vision of USDA’s School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children (SMI) is to improve the health of school children through better nutrition. Implementing the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* in school meals will have important health benefits for children.

Menu Planning Practices for Healthy School Meals

- Choose low-fat sauces to be served with pasta dishes. Tomato-based and other vegetable sauces are naturally low in fat.
- Use low-fat cheeses. Good choices include part skim mozzarella and part skim ricotta cheeses.
- Serve a variety of vegetables with pasta dishes. Broccoli, peas, shredded carrots, red pepper strips, chopped tomatoes, and zucchini or butternut squash are delicious with pasta.
- Serve whole grain pasta for increased fiber and other key nutrients.
- Use fresh and frozen vegetables, where feasible, in place of canned vegetables, which are higher in sodium.

Did you know?

The name “pasta” is the Italian word for “paste” because of the basic ingredients of flour and water.

Culinary Techniques for Cooking Pasta

1. Use plenty of water. A minimum of 1 gallon of water per pound of pasta is recommended.
2. Bring water to boil and add salt. Use at least 1/2 tablespoon of salt for each gallon of water. Seasoning the water will enhance the flavor of the pasta and may require less salt needed in the sauce.
3. Gradually add pasta so water continues to boil; stir to prevent sticking.
4. Cook according to time specified in directions. Pasta should be cooked al dente, or firm to the bite, yet cooked through. If the pasta is to be used as part of a dish that requires further cooking, undercook the pasta by 1/3 of the cooking time specified.
5. Pour into large colander to drain.
6. If pasta is to be used cold in a salad, rinse immediately with cold, running water until the pasta is cooled or cool drained pasta on sheet pans in the refrigerator. Follow your operations food safety procedures.
7. If pasta is to be served hot, place into steam table pan and serve immediately.
8. Cook pasta in batches. It will not hold longer than 30 minutes without becoming mushy and unappetizing.

Pasta and the Perfect Sauce

There are hundreds of shapes and sizes of pasta with each shape used for different preparations based on how the sauce will cling, the texture desired, or how the product will be used. For example:

- Pasta shapes with holes or ridges, such as wagon wheels or rotini, are perfect for chunkier sauces like chunky tomato sauce.
- Thin, delicate pastas, such as angel hair or vermicelli, are better served with light, thin sauces like a vinaigrette or pesto sauce.
- Thicker pasta shapes, such as fettuccine, work well with heavier sauces like cream-style or cheese sauces.
- Very small pasta shapes, such as alphabet shapes and acini di pepe (meaning “seeds of pepper”), are good for soups.

Culinary Resources

- National Food Service Management Institute, *Cooking for the New Generation*, 2007.
- National Food Service Management Institute, *Culinary Techniques for Healthy School Meals*, 1996.
- National Food Service Management Institute, *Healthy Cuisine for Kids*, 2005.

National Food Service
Management Institute
The University of Mississippi
6 Jeanette Phillips Drive
Post Office Drawer 188
University, Mississippi 38677-0188
800-321-3054 · nfsmi@olemiss.edu



For more information, visit us on the web at nfsmi.org

Mrs. Magnet's Homemade Tomato Sauce

Size of Portions: 1/4 cup No. of Servings: 50

Perfect pasta is a perennial favorite of school children of all ages. Try using whole wheat pasta in place of some or all of the pasta you serve. Experiment with different shapes and sauces. Try various vegetable based sauces such as the Broccoli Sauce prepared by Chef Barbara Lynch of Boston. Thanks to Sue Magnet and the Marblehead Community Charter Public School in Marblehead, Massachusetts for sharing this recipe.

Ingredients	Weight	Measures	Instructions
Olive oil, extra virgin		1/2 cup	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> In a large stainless steel (not aluminum) pot heat the oil. Add onions, green peppers and garlic; sauté until the onions are soft. Add the crushed tomatoes and tomato paste, mix well. Add herbs and cheese; mix well. Season with salt and pepper. Cook over medium heat for approximately 2 hours.
Onions, yellow, diced		3/4 cup	
Green peppers, diced		3/4 cup	
Garlic, chipped fine		3 tablespoons	
Crushed tomatoes, canned		2 #10 cans	
Tomato paste		3 tablespoons	
Parsley, fresh, chopped		1/2 cup	
Basil, dried		3 tablespoons	
Oregano, dried		2 tablespoons	
Parmesan cheese, grated		1/2 cup	
Kosher salt		1 tablespoon	
Black pepper		1/2 tablespoon	

Nutrients per serving

Calories	65	Saturated Fat	.5 g	Iron	1.8 mg
Protein	2.4 g	Cholesterol	.7 mg	Calcium	60 mg
Carbohydrate	9.6 g	Vitamin A	930 IU	Sodium	290 mg
Total Fat	2.8 g	Vitamin C	14 mg	Dietary Fiber	2.6 g

For additional perfect pasta recipes:

USDA Recipes for Schools, 2006. Includes recipes such as **Vegetable Lasagna** and **Pasta Salad**.

USDA Recipes for Child Care, 2005. Includes recipes such as **Pasta Toss with Vegetables** and **Tomato Pasta Soup**.

Source: Marblehead Community Charter Public School

This recipe is not USDA tested.