



Grains of truth about PASTA MAKERS

Definitions

Designed for creative consumers who want to make fresh pasta, pasta makers are available in both manual and motorized models. Using a pasta maker reduces the amount of time needed for hand-made pasta and allows for a larger variety of shapes. Pasta makers also let consumers experiment with a variety of seasonings, such as tomato, spinach, herb and lemon.

Availability

Both types of machines are available through kitchen shops, discount stores and mail-order catalogues. The price ranges from about \$30 to \$60 for a manual and \$100 to \$300 for an electric.

Operation

Semolina, the coarsely ground endosperm of durum wheat, is the best for making pasta dough. Because of durum's golden yellow color, no eggs are needed. Other flours that may be used include durum flour, all-purpose flour and whole wheat flour. Durum flour is more consumer-friendly than semolina for the home pasta maker. While semolina is the best choice for commercial pasta, it doesn't always mix well with water and forms a smooth dough.

Manual pasta makers

The dough is first mixed by hand, in a mixer with a dough hook, or in a food processor. The hand-cranked models can be used to knead and roll the dough into thin sheets before cutting it into a variety of sizes. Only flat noodles can be made, but in a variety of widths.

To operate, a ball of dough is repeatedly passed between the smooth rollers of the pasta maker until the dough becomes smooth and satiny. The rollers are then adjusted closer and closer together to achieve the desired thickness and a smooth, even sheet that is then cut into strips by passing between sets of edged rollers.

Electric pasta makers

Although new complex, electric pasta makers are more versatile than manual versions, most come with at least three disks; one for flat, round and tubular shapes. The machine completes the entire process of mixing, kneading and extruding the pasta. Follow manufacturer's directions to operate.

Purchasing tips

When shopping for a pasta maker, consider the following points:

1. Cost relative to the frequency the maker is expected to be used.
2. Completeness of the owner's manual.
3. Inclusion of recipe books.
4. Availability of a good cleaning tool (though a toothbrush can be used).

Manual:

1. Ease of assembly and clean-up.
2. Removability of cutting heads to allow for additional attachments.
3. Optional heads available for ravioli, spaghetti and lasagna.

Electric:

1. Ease of assembly.
2. Inclusion of a thermal-overload protector.
3. Number of disks.
4. Availability of additional disks.
5. Ability to change extruding disks during operation, so assorted shapes can be made from one batch of dough.
6. Untimed operation to allow dough to reach proper consistency before extruding.
7. Removable parts that can be put in dishwasher.
8. Length of warranty.



Recipes

Homemade Egg Noodles

(makes 1½ pounds of pasta)

3 cups durum flour
3 large eggs, lightly beaten
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon oil
3 tablespoons water

Mix all ingredients by hand, in a mixer with a dough hook or in a food processor. Add more liquid if the dough is too hard or more flour if the dough is sticky. Knead until smooth. Cover and let rest 10 to 20 minutes.

Divide dough into four portions. Flatten one portion and lightly flour. Pass between the smooth rollers that have been opened to their widest setting. Fold the rolled sheet into thirds, flour lightly and turn 90 degrees before running it between the rollers again. Repeat the folding, flouring and rolling until the dough is smooth.

Decrease the gap between the rollers by several notches and pass the dough through again. Repeat the process, decreasing the gap and rolling the dough until it is thin enough to cut into shapes. Lay dough on a lightly floured surface and let dry 1 hour, turning over once. Cut dough into noodles.

Noodles may be cooked immediately, frozen or dried. Dried noodles may be stored in a well-sealed container in a cool place for a week or in the freezer for about a month.

Basic Pasta

Combine 3 cups durum flour and enough water (about ¾ cups) to make a stiff dough. Cover and let rest 10 minutes. Continue with directions for noodles.

Tomato Pasta

Add one 6-ounce can tomato paste to 3 cups durum flour and enough water to make a stiff dough. Continue with directions for noodles.

Spinach Pasta

Add ½ cup fresh pureed spinach to 3 cups durum flour and enough water to make a stiff dough. Frozen or parboiled fresh spinach may be used: thoroughly drain and then squeeze the leaves as dry as possible before using. Continue with directions for noodles.

Herb Pasta

Prepare pasta as directed, except add 1 teaspoon dried basil, marjoram, oregano or sage, crushed to flour mixture.

Whole-Wheat Pasta

Substituting 1 cup of whole-wheat flour for one cup of durum flour is recommended. You may need to add a little more water, as whole-wheat flour absorbs more moisture.

Tomato Basil Pasta

1½ pounds fresh basil pasta, cut into spaghetti or linguini
¼ cup olive oil
1 tablespoon minced garlic
1½ pounds cherry tomatoes; cut into quarters
8 quarts water
2 teaspoons salt
¼ cup fresh basil leaves, cut into thin strips
⅓ cup aged Asiago cheese
fresh basil sprigs

In a medium skillet over low heat, sauté garlic in olive oil for approximately two minutes. Add tomatoes and sauté until heated thoroughly (about 3 minutes); keep warm.

In a large kettle, bring water and salt to boiling and add pasta. Cook until *al dente*, about 8 minutes; drain.

In a large warm serving bowl, combine pasta, basil strips and tomato mixture. Toss to mix well. Serve on individual plates, top with Asiago cheese and garnish with basil sprig. Makes 12 servings.

Nutrition analysis: One serving provides approximately: 156 calories, 5 g protein, 20 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 7 g fat (1 g saturated), 3 mg cholesterol, 49 mcg folate, 1 mg iron, 52 mg calcium, 154 mg potassium and 401 mg sodium.

Sources: Williams and Sonoma, Complete Pasta Cookbook, Time-Life Custom Publishing, 1996.

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