

BUSYCOOK Meals in a hurry



Pasta's faster

Bake it or boil it ... the secret to good pasta is in the sauce

My brother's favourite pasta dish I threw together during typhoon season in Hong Kong.

The markets were all closed and we were stuck at home listening to the fury of the wind.

Our fridge yielded frozen chicken, some mixed vegetables and a packet of macaroni. We also had a rather tired looking block of cheddar cheese.

I decided to rustle up an Asian version of macaroni and cheese. Happily, the experiment worked and even now, my younger brother Felix would ask me to make it, typhoon or no typhoon.

Basically, pasta's always a good option if you'd forgotten to go marketing.

A packet of pasta will willingly languish in the store cupboard until inspiration or desperation strikes.

It's filling, too, so it can be a crowd pleaser for unexpected company. To make it work, just get imaginative with the sauces.

There's always good old tomato sauce or a hot olive oil and dried herb mixture. Next time you pick up a spare packet of pasta, hop onto the next aisle and drop in a can of tomato puree and a bottle of olive oil. Dried herbs like basil and oregano are nice standbys.

I'm offering you two recipes this week to play with. The

Baked Macaroni is fun and cuts like a pie, oozing cheese.

The Penne with Garlic Mushrooms is more "adult" in that it uses stronger flavours.

But it's a great way to impress and a better pick-up than the "come see my etchings" variety. Never figured out what etchings were, anyway.

In both recipes, the pasta is pre-cooked. The secret to nice cooked pasta is to use plenty of boiling water so the pasta can move around the pot. I like putting in a generous spoonful of olive oil and a teaspoon of salt.

Pasta is done when you can bite into it easily - the so called al dente stage.

Bon appetit or should it be buono appetito?



by Pauline D Loh

pauline@newstoday.com.sg

TIPS & TRICKS

Pasta Shapes

There are so many pasta shapes that we often get confused. Here's a quick guide I found on the www.ilovepasta.org site. Useful guide if you are planning an Italian night out with the girls. Time to impress them with your pasta panache!

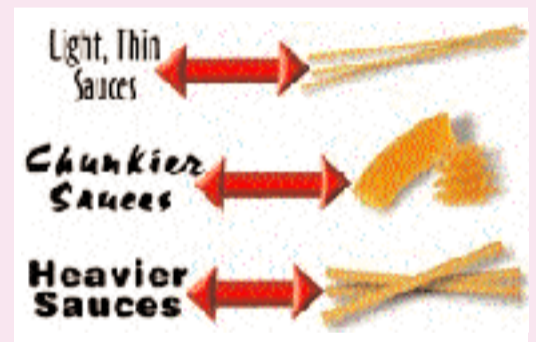
Macaroni ("Dumpling") - A highly versatile shape that can be topped with any sauce, baked, or put in soups, salads and stir-fry dishes.

Rotini ("Spirals" or "Twists") - Rotini's twisted shape holds bits of meat, vegetables and cheese, so it works well with any sauce, or you can use it to create fun salads, baked casseroles, or stir-fry meals.

Angel Hair, Capellini ("Fine Hairs") - Thin, delicate strands are best if used with thinner, delicate sauces. Other uses: break in half and put in soup; use in salads or stir-fry meals.

Manicotti ("Small Muffs") - Stuff Manicotti with a mixture of meat, cheese and vegetables, top with your favorite sauce, and bake. Or stuff and freeze for a later time.

Jumbo Shells - Best when stuffed with your favorite mixtures of cheese, meat and vegetables. Stuff with meat flavored with taco seasoning, top with salsa and bake for a delicious Mexican dish, or create your own stuffed treat



Bow Ties, Farfalle ("Butterflies") - Bow Ties brighten any meal with their interesting shape. Thick enough for any sauce, or make into a salad or soup.

Fettuccine ("Small Ribbons") - Perfect for heavier sauces, like cheese, meat and tomato sauces. For variety, try breaking in half and putting in soups, or use for a salad.

Penne, Mostaccioli ("Quills" and "Small Mustaches," respectively) - This tubular pasta goes well with sauce, used in salads, baked in casseroles, or made into stir fry dishes.

Lasagne (From "lasanum," Latin for pot) - Create new Lasagne casseroles by using chopped vegetables, cheeses and any kind of sauce. You can also assemble your casserole and freeze it for later.

Fusilli ("Twisted Spaghetti") - This long, spiraled shape can be topped with any sauce, broken in half and added to soups, or turned into a beautiful salad.

Baked Macaroni

Ingredients:

2 cups macaroni
1 pkt chicken thigh, diced
1 can mushrooms, halved
1 pkt shredded cheddar
1 small onion, diced
garlic, to taste
1 cup mixed vegetables
two pieces of bread, cubed
Olive oil

Method:

1. Preheat oven to 180 deg C. Boil the macaroni 10 minutes, or until plumped up and cooked. Drain and set aside.
2. Fry onions in a little olive

oil. Add chicken and fry till the meat changes colour. Add mushrooms.

3. Add macaroni to meat mixture. Add mixed vegetables, stir well to combine.
4. Mix in the cheddar cheese. Remove mixture from heat at once.

5. Toss the cubed bread in some olive oil and the minced garlic. Spread the bread cubes on top of macaroni mixture.
6. Bake the macaroni for 15 minutes or until topping turns a nice golden brown.
7. Serve with salad.

Penne with Garlic Mushrooms

Ingredients:

1 pkt penne
1 punnet fresh mushrooms
2 bulbs garlic, minced
Olive oil
Red pepper, cut into strips

Method:

1. Boil penne 10 minutes or until cooked. Drain and set aside.
2. Brown half the minced garlic in the olive oil. Add the sliced mushrooms.
3. Cook until the water from the mushrooms evaporates, add the rest of garlic to the

mushrooms. Turn off the fire. Season with salt and black pepper.

4. Mix in the penne and stir well so the pasta is well coated with the mushroom and garlic mixture. Add in the raw red pepper strips. Serve hot.

