Top Ten Weeknight Pasta Favorites

If you’re looking for a fast, delicious pasta dinner, look no further

We polled our staffers to find out which of Fine Cooking’s quick pastas were their favorites. Here you’ll find the ones that made their lists. Each is a breeze to make and takes less than 45 minutes to pull together.

### Pasta with Sausage, Olives, Sun-Dried Tomatoes & Cream

*Serves six to eight.*

- Kosher salt
- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely diced
- 1 medium clove garlic, finely chopped
- 1 1/4 lb. hot Italian sausage, casings removed
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1 cup pitted Kalamata olives, coarsely chopped
- 1 cup (about 6 oz.) oil-packed sun-dried tomato halves, drained and coarsely chopped
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1/4 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 1 lb. dried farfalle or fusilli
- Freshly ground black pepper

Set a large pot of salted water over high heat and bring to a boil.

Meanwhile, in a large sauté pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute. Add the sausage and cook, breaking it into bite-size pieces with a spoon, until just cooked through, 6 to 8 minutes. Spoon off the fat if it’s excessive. Add the wine, increase the heat to medium high, and cook, scraping up any browned bits in the pan, until most of the wine is evaporated, 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in the olives and sun-dried tomatoes and cook for 2 minutes.

Add the cream, increase the heat to high, bring to a boil, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the cream thickens slightly, 2 to 5 minutes. Stir in 2 Tbs. of the parsley and 2 Tbs. of the Parmigiano. Keep the sauce warm over low heat.

Cook the pasta in the boiling water until al dente. Reserve 1/4 cup of the cooking water and then drain the pasta. Return the pasta to its pot, add the sauce and the reserved cooking water, and set the pot over high heat. Gently toss the pasta for 30 to 60 seconds and season to taste with salt and pepper. Divide among warm bowls and sprinkle with the remaining 2 Tbs. Parmigiano and 2 Tbs. parsley.

—Joanne McAllister Smart, Fine Cooking #76

© 2006 The Taunton Press, Inc. Copying and/or distribution of this article is not permitted.
Linguine with Clams & Lemon-Garlic Oil
Serves four.

For a foolproof method for removing the grit from clams, soak them in cold salted water (about 1 1/2 Tbs. salt for 1 qt. water) with 2 Tbs. cornmeal for 20 minutes. Rinse and scrub the clams well before cooking.

Kosher salt
1 lemon
3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
1 lb. dried linguine
1/4 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
2 lb. small clams (like littlenecks), rinsed and scrubbed to remove grit
1/2 cup dry white wine
Freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley; more for garnish

Set a large pot of salted water over high heat and bring to a boil.

Peel five 1-inch-wide strips of zest from the lemon with a peeler. Cut the lemon in half for juicing later.

Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and lemon strips and cook, shaking the pan occasionally, until the garlic starts to brown around the edges, about 3 minutes. Remove from the heat and use a fork to pick out and discard the lemon strips. Transfer a little more than 1/4 cup of the oil (without the garlic) to a small bowl.

Put the pasta in the water.

Raise the heat under the skillet to high and add the red pepper flakes and the clams. Cook the clams for 1 minute, shaking the pan. Pour in the wine and cook for 1 minute. Cover the pan and cook, shaking the pan occasionally, until all the clam shells open, 3 to 5 minutes.

Finish cooking the linguine until it’s just tender, about 10 minutes total. Drain and add to the clams. Raise the heat to high and cook for 1 to 2 minutes, tossing gently. Stir in the 1/2 cup parsley and a squeeze of lemon juice (about 1 Tbs.).

Add more salt, pepper, or lemon juice to taste. Serve immediately, topped with a drizzle of the reserved lemon-garlic oil and more parsley.

—Tony Rosenfeld, Fine Cooking #60

Fusilli with Feta & Lemon-Caper Pesto
Serves four as a light main course.

The idea here is to make a tangy, lemony pasta sauce with feta and a few pantry staples. You can make it in the time it takes to cook the pasta. You can use a large Japanese mortar and pestle for the sauce—it takes about 5 minutes of pounding—but a blender is even faster.

FOR THE PASTA:
Kosher salt
1/2 lb. dried fusilli
1 bunch fresh spinach (10 oz.), stems cut off, leaves washed well but not dried
1/4 lb. feta, crumbled (3/4 cup)

FOR THE PESTO:
1 small clove garlic; more or less to taste
2 to 3 anchovy fillets (if you can get salt-packed anchovies, even better), rinsed and patted dry
1 Tbs. capers (preferably salt-packed), soaked briefly and rinsed
One 1-inch strip lemon zest, minced
3/4 oz. feta, crumbled (2 Tbs.)
1/4 cup roughly chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
2 or 3 fresh basil leaves (optional)

1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Set a large pot of salted water over high heat and bring to a boil. Add the pasta and cook until al dente. Reserve about 1/2 cup of the cooking water before draining the pasta, and don’t wash the pot.

As the pasta cooks, put the wet spinach in a large skillet over medium heat. Add a dash of salt, cover, and cook for 3 to 4 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat, keeping the lid on; the spinach will wilt and stay bright green.

If using a blender, put in the garlic, anchovies, capers, lemon zest, the 2 Tbs. feta, parsley, basil, lemon juice, olive oil, salt, and pepper and blend until the pesto is creamy. If using a mortar, add the pesto ingredients one at a time, pounding with a pestle until well mashed and blended before adding the next ingredient. Thin the pesto with the reserved pasta water to get the consistency of runny cream; you probably won’t have to use the entire 1/2 cup water.

Return the pasta to the pot in which it was cooked; add the spinach (drain any liquid left in the pan) and the pesto, stirring very well to coat the pasta. Stir in the 3/8 cup crumbled feta and serve.

—Daphne Zepos, Fine Cooking #46

Angel Hair Pasta with Lemon Cream Sauce
Serves four as a first course.

If you happen to have some grappa on hand, this fiery Italian spirit is a delicious alternative for the gin in this recipe.

Kosher salt
2 lemons
1 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup gin or grappa
3/4 lb. fresh angel hair pasta
Freshly ground black pepper
1/4 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Set a large pot of salted water over high heat and bring to a boil.

Meanwhile, finely grate the zest of one of the lemons; set aside. Cut a thick slice off both ends of the zested lemon to expose the flesh. Stand the fruit upright; then, cutting from the top down, remove the peel, including all the white pith. Holding the fruit over a bowl to catch the juice, use a paring knife to
Garlicky Angel Hair with Grape Tomatoes

*Serves two as a main dish or four as a generous side dish.*

**Kosher salt**
1 tsp. plus 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more for the baking sheet
2 pt. grape tomatoes (about 20 oz.)
4 large or 5 small cloves garlic
Large pinch crushed red pepper flakes
12 large leaves fresh basil
5 oz. dried angel hair pasta
Freshly ground black pepper
½ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Set a large pot of salted water over high heat and bring to a boil.

Adjust an oven rack to the upper-middle position and heat the broiler to high. Line a large rimmed baking sheet with foil and rub it with oil. Toss the tomatoes with 1 tsp. oil and about ¼ tsp. salt. Spread them on the baking sheet. Broil, shaking the pan occasionally, until they’re cracked, very soft, and shrunken, about 20 minutes; they’ll be blackened in places.

Meanwhile, chop the garlic and put it in a small saucepan, along with 3 Tbs. oil and the red pepper flakes. Bring to a simmer over medium heat and cook until the garlic just begins to turn golden, about 1 minute. Remove from the heat and let the oil steep.

Stack the basil leaves on top of one another and roll them into a cigar shape. Slice across the cigar to create thin—but not ultra-thin—ribbons (about 1¼ cup).

When the tomatoes are done, cook the pasta until tender, 3 to 4 minutes. Drain the pasta and return it to the pot. Immediately toss it with the garlic oil and ½ to 1 tsp. salt. Grind lots of fresh pepper over the pasta, add the broiled tomatoes and the basil, and toss to combine well. Add half the Parmigiano, toss again, and immediately turn out into warm bowls. Top with the remaining Parmigiano.

—Susie Middleton, Fine Cooking #51

Stir-Fried Shrimp with Spinach & Peanut Noodles

*Serves three to four.*

Look for fresh egg noodles in the produce section of the supermarket near the tofu and egg roll wrappers.

**Kosher salt**
½ cup smooth peanut butter
One 1-inch chunk fresh ginger (about ½ oz.), peeled and thinly sliced
2 Tbs. soy sauce
1 Tbs. rice vinegar
¼ tsp. chile paste or hot sauce
1 Tbs. vegetable oil
1 lb. large shrimp (21-25 count), peeled and deveined
1 clove garlic, thinly sliced
9 oz. fresh Chinese egg noodles (or ½ lb. dried spaghetti)
10 oz. fresh spinach, thick stems removed, large leaves torn in half, washed, and dried
Green part of 1 scallion, thinly sliced (about 1 Tbs.)

Set a large pot of salted water over high heat and bring to a boil.

Meanwhile, in a mini chopper or a small food processor, combine the peanut butter, ginger, soy sauce, rice vinegar, chile paste, and 1 tsp. of the oil. Process, scraping the sides as needed,
until mostly smooth.

Heat the remaining 2 tsp. oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. When the oil is very hot (it should be shimmering), add the shrimp and stir frequently until the shrimp start to look pink on both sides and opaque in the middle, 2 to 4 minutes. Transfer to a large bowl. Reduce the heat to medium, add the garlic and cook until softened and lightly golden, about 30 to 60 seconds. Pour ½ cup water into the pan and stir to loosen any browned bits on the bottom of the pan. Pour the water and the garlic into the peanut butter purée and process to blend until smooth.

Cook the noodles in the boiling water until just tender, 3 to 5 minutes (if using dried pasta, see the package for cooking times). Stir in the spinach and blanch until it softens, about 30 seconds. Drain the noodles and spinach and transfer to the bowl with the shrimp. Pour the sauce over the noodles and toss. Garnish with the scallion and serve immediately.

—Maryellen Driscoll, Fine Cooking #56

### Rotini with Spiced Tomato & Black Olive Meat Sauce

Serves four.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kosher salt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cloves garlic, minced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ lb. ground beef (I prefer 85% lean)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ tsp. ground cinnamon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshly ground black pepper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One 28-oz. can whole peeled tomatoes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¼ lb. dried rotini</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ tsp. granulated sugar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup pitted Kalamata olives, quartered lengthwise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup packed chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Set a large pot of salted water over high heat and bring to a boil.

Heat the oil, garlic, and red pepper flakes in a large saucepan over medium heat. When the garlic is fragrant but not browned, about 1 minute, add the beef and cinnamon and season generously with salt and pepper. Cook the beef, using a large spoon to break it into small pieces, until it’s evenly browned, 3 to 4 minutes.

Put the pasta in the water.

Pour the tomatoes and their juices into the saucepan, lower the heat to medium, and cook for 5 minutes, using the spoon to break them into smaller pieces. Stir in the sugar, the olives, and all but 2 Tbs. of the parsley. Taste for salt and pepper and keep the sauce warm over low heat.

Finish cooking the rotini until it’s just tender, about 8 minutes total. Drain and add to the meat sauce. Cook together, stirring well, for 1 minute. Serve immediately, sprinkled with the remaining 2 Tbs. parsley.

—Tony Rosenfeld, Fine Cooking #60

### Capellini Capricciosi (Spicy Angel Hair)

Serves six.

You can find peperoncini—hot, pickled peppers also known as Tuscan peppers—in the supermarket near pickles and relishes or with other imported Italian products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kosher salt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ tsp. olive oil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 slices of bacon, chopped</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 medium onions, thinly sliced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 peperoncini, drained, seeded and chopped</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 cups crushed peeled Italian tomatoes (about one 35-oz. can, drained)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 lb. angel hair pasta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¾ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley (optional)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Set a pot of salted water over high heat and bring to a boil.

In a large, nonreactive skillet, heat 3 Tbs. of the olive oil over medium heat. Add the bacon and cook until lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 15 minutes.

Add the peperoncini, tomatoes, and ¼ tsp. salt, and simmer for about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, add the pasta to the boiling water and cook until al dente, about 3 minutes. Drain the pasta and toss it with the rest of the olive oil. Stir in the sauce. Add the cheese, toss well, and serve immediately, garnished with the parsley if you like.

—Lidia Bastianich, Fine Cooking #24
Spaghetti with Portabellas, Sage & Walnuts
Serves four.

Kosher salt
3 ¼ lb. dried spaghetti
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup unsalted butter
3 large portabella mushroom caps, gills scraped out and discarded, caps thinly sliced and cut into 2-inch pieces
Freshly ground black pepper
2 ⅔ cup loosely packed fresh sage leaves
1 ⅓ cup toasted walnuts, coarsely chopped
1 ½ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Set a large pot of salted water over high heat and bring to a boil.

Meanwhile, in a large saucepan over medium-high heat, heat the garlic and red pepper flakes in the oil until they're fragrant and sizzle steadily for about 30 seconds. Add the tomatoes and their juices and the vodka, and bring to a boil. Then reduce the heat to a steady simmer, cover with the lid slightly ajar, and cook to intensify the flavors and reduce the sauce slightly (by about one-quarter), 10 to 15 minutes.

Purée the tomatoes using a hand blender or a regular blender. If you used a regular blender to purée, return the sauce to the saucepan. Stir in ¼ cup of the Parmigiano, the parsley, cream, ½ tsp. each salt and pepper, and more red pepper flakes if you like. Simmer to incorporate the cream and reduce the sauce slightly, about 5 minutes. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and keep warm.

Meanwhile, cook the pasta, stirring occasionally, until it's just tender to the tooth, 10 to 12 minutes. Drain well and return the pasta to its pot. Add the sauce, set the pot over medium heat, and cook, stirring, to let the pasta absorb some of the sauce, 1 minute. Serve immediately with a sprinkled with the remaining ¼ cup Parmigiano.

—Tony Rosenfeld, Fine Cooking #77

Rigatoni with Spicy Tomato-Vodka Sauce
Serves four.

If you’re not a fan of spicy foods, you can use less crushed red pepper flakes.

Kosher salt
2 cloves garlic, minced
¾ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes; more to taste
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
One 28-oz. can diced tomatoes
3 Tbs. vodka
1 ½ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
3 Tbs. heavy cream
Freshly ground black pepper
3 ¼ lb. dried rigatoni (about 4 cups)