

Ricotta Pasta Alla Vodka

By Eric Kim

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Total Time 45 minutes

Prep Time 15 minutes

Cook Time 30 minutes

Rating ★★★★★ (2,792)



James Ransom for The New York Times. Food Stylist: Barrett Washburne.

In a 1974 cookbook, the Italian actor Ugo Tognazzi published a recipe for pasta all'infuriata, "furious pasta," a chile-vodka-spiked tomato number. It's one of the first written accounts of vodka in pasta. The alcohol is said to help fat disperse more evenly, keeping the sauce emulsion glossy and creamy, and to help you smell, and in turn taste, the sauce's flavors in a heightened way. The ricotta serving suggestion draws inspiration from the creamy tomato soup with three dollops of cool, sweet ricotta on top from the now-closed Caffè Falai in Manhattan's NoLiTa neighborhood. The ricotta lends coolness both in temperature and in flavor, offering relief between bites of spicy booziness.

INGREDIENTS

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

Kosher salt

1 tablespoon olive oil

4 slices thick-cut bacon (6 ounces), coarsely chopped

1½ teaspoons red-pepper flakes

1 teaspoon dried oregano

4 large garlic cloves, crushed but left whole

1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped

Freshly ground black pepper

5 tablespoons tomato paste, preferably double-concentrated

¾ to 1 cup vodka, depending on how boozy you want it

1 pound fusilli, penne or rigatoni

1 cup heavy cream

4 ounces Pecorino Romano or Parmesan, finely grated (1 cup)

1 cup/8 ounces whole-milk ricotta

Finely chopped flat-leaf parsley or basil, for serving

PREPARATION

Step 1

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil.

Step 2

Heat a large, high-sided skillet over medium-high. Add the oil and bacon and cook, stirring occasionally, until the bacon is crispy at the edges, about 5 minutes. Carefully drain all but 3 tablespoons of the fat, reserving any excess for later.

Step 3

Lower the heat to medium. Stir in the red-pepper flakes, oregano and garlic and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, just a few seconds. Add the onion, season generously with salt and pepper and cook over medium-high, stirring, until the onion is translucent, about 5 minutes. Add more bacon fat if the pan dries out. Add the tomato paste and stir constantly until slightly darker in color, about 3 minutes. Turn off the heat and stir in the vodka.

Step 4

Add the pasta to the boiling water and cook according to package instructions until 2 minutes shy of al dente.

Step 5

While the pasta cooks, turn the heat under the sauce to high and cook, stirring constantly, until reduced by three-quarters, about 2 minutes. Add the cream and bring to a simmer. Take off the heat.

Step 6

Reserve 2 cups of the pasta water. Drain the pasta and add to the pan with the sauce, along with 1 cup pasta water and most of the pecorino. Cook over medium-high, stirring vigorously with one

hand while moving the pan back and forth with the other, until the sauce glossily drapes the noodles, 5 to 7 minutes. Add more pasta water if the sauce looks dry. Fish out the garlic cloves. Taste and season with more salt and pepper, as desired.

Step 7

Divide the pasta among plates, sprinkling with any remaining pecorino and dolloping each serving with three spoonfuls of ricotta. Top with the parsley, which adds necessary freshness to counter the richness.

Private Notes

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