


# Penne Alla Vodka With Chicken

By J. Kenji López-Alt

 Servings: 4-6 (makes about 8 cups)

 Active: 40 mins | Total: 1 hour 10 mins

- One (28-ounce) can whole tomatoes, with their juices
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 medium yellow onion (8 ounces), diced small
- 2 medium garlic cloves, minced or finely grated
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- Pinch crushed red pepper flakes
- 1 sprig fresh basil (optional)
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/4 cup vodka
- 12 ounces dried penne, ziti or other short pasta
- Fine salt
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1/2-inch-wide strips
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, for serving
- Grated parmesan cheese, for serving

## Step 1

Crush the tomatoes either by hand or with a potato masher into 1/2-inch chunks. As you work, place the crushed tomatoes into a medium bowl. (Alternatively, you can use kitchen shears to cut the tomatoes into smaller pieces.)

## Step 2

In a medium (3-quart) saucepan over medium-high heat, heat the oil and melt the butter. Once the foaming subsides, add the onion and cook, stirring frequently, until softened but not browned, about 3 minutes. Add the garlic, oregano and crushed red pepper flakes and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the tomatoes, with their juices, and basil, if using. (If you used kitchen shears to cut the tomatoes, you may want to crush them further with a wooden spoon.) Increase the heat to high and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat so the sauce is barely simmering and cook, stirring occasionally, until it thickens and reduces to about 4 cups, 20 to 30 minutes. Discard the basil.

## Step 3

Working in batches as needed, transfer the sauce to a blender. Add the cream and vodka. Remove the center knob on the lid (to allow steam to escape); place a paper towel over the lid opening to avoid splash-ups. Starting on the lowest speed and gradually increasing to high, blend until completely smooth, about 30 seconds. Return the sauce to the saucepan, set it over high heat and bring just to a boil. (Alternatively, remove the saucepan from the heat and use an immersion blender to puree the sauce until smooth. Return the saucepan to medium-low heat and proceed with the recipe as follows.) Reduce the heat to medium-low and cook, stirring occasionally, to reduce the sauce further while the pasta cooks.

## Step 4

Place the pasta in a large pot and cover with water by a couple of inches. Add a large pinch of salt and bring to a boil over high heat, stirring occasionally to keep the pasta from sticking. Continue to cook until the pasta is fully softened but retains a slight bite in the center.

## Step 5

About 5 minutes before the pasta is done (when you can bite into the pasta, but it still resists more than you'd be comfortable dealing with on the plate), add the chicken to the sauce, stir to combine and cook until cooked through, about 5 minutes.

## Step 6

Reserve 1 1/2 cups of the starchy cooking water and drain the pasta, then return the pasta to the large pot and add the sauce. Stir to combine, and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until the sauce achieves the desired consistency, about 1 minute, adding a splash of the reserved pasta cooking water as necessary.

## Step 7

Divide the pasta among individual bowls, top with the parsley and grated cheese, and serve right away.

### **Substitutions**

Gluten-free? >> Use gluten-free pasta.

Vegetarian? >> Skip the chicken.

Parmesan >> pecorino Romano or grana padano.

