

# Basic Principles for Preparing Pasta

## PASTA SHAPES

There are hundreds of shapes and sizes of pasta with each shape used for different preparations based on how the sauce will cling, the texture desired, or how the product will be used. For example:

- Pasta shapes with holes or ridges, such as wagon wheels or rotini, are perfect for chunkier sauces.
- Thin, delicate pastas, such as angel hair or vermicelli, are better served with light, thin sauces.
- Thicker pasta shapes, such as fettuccine, work well with heavier sauces.
- Very small pasta shapes, like alphabet shapes and acini di pepe, are good for soups.

Flavored pasta is available in a variety of shapes in both the dried and fresh forms. Vegetable ingredients are added to pasta to provide both color and flavor. An example of flavored pasta is spinach noodles that are green. Follow the package directions for cooking flavored pastas.

## COOKING TIME DEPENDS ON THE SHAPE

It is important to be familiar with different shapes of pasta so cooking times can be adjusted. The larger and fuller the pasta shape, the longer the cooking time. Most pasta recipes specify cooking times for pasta cooked *al dente*, tender but firm. *Al dente* is an Italian phrase that means “to the tooth.” Some of the pasta shapes and cooking times are shown in the “Cooking Chart for Various Pasta Shapes.” Just seeing this chart helps to emphasize how important it is to follow the recipe and cook pasta the right way.

## PASTA GETS BIGGER AND HEAVIER WHEN COOKED

Generally, pasta doubles or triples in weight when it is cooked. Likewise, the volume increases 2 to 2 ½ times during cooking. So, if 1 gallon of dry pasta is measured, the cooked pasta would measure 2-3 gallons. Follow the recipe to cook the amount needed.

## FOLLOW THE RECIPE












The general rule for cooking pasta in boiling water is for 1 pound of pasta, use 1 gallon of water, 1 teaspoon of salt, and 1 teaspoon of oil. For 100 servings of spaghetti, 6 gallons of water, 2 tablespoons of salt, and 2 tablespoons of oil are needed to cook 6 pounds of dried spaghetti.

When pasta is to be used as an ingredient in a recipe that will be cooked more, like macaroni and cheese, it should be slightly undercooked. This means reducing the cooking time by about 2 minutes. Pasta that is not cooked enough is tough and chewy. Pasta that is overcooked is soft and pasty. When overcooked pasta is combined with a sauce, it often breaks apart. Handle pasta the right way after it is cooked. Like most foods, pasta is best when it is cooked and served right away. However, it is sometimes necessary to cook it ahead and hold it until time for service.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR HOLDING PASTA**

<b>To serve immediately</b>	Drain, add sauce, and serve.
<b>To hold for a short time for service later</b>	Drain, toss with a small amount of oil to prevent sticking, cover, and hold in warmer.
<b>To serve as part of a salad</b>	Cook pasta a day ahead so it will be chilled when combined with the other salad ingredients. Do not combine hot pasta with cold ingredients. Drain and cover with cold water just long enough to cool. The pasta does not need refrigeration for the short time it is cooling in the water. When pasta is cool, drain and toss lightly with oil to prevent sticking or drying out. Cover and refrigerate.
<b>To cook a day ahead for service in a heated dish</b>	Drain and cover with cold water just long enough to cool. The pasta does not need refrigeration for the short time it is cooling in the water. When pasta is cool, drain and toss lightly with oil to prevent sticking or drying out. Cover and refrigerate. When it is time to use the pasta, immerse it in boiling water until just heated through. Drain immediately and use according to the recipe. The pasta should not be cooked more, just heated to serving temperature.
<b>To use in a cooked dish</b>	Slightly undercook the pasta.

## COOKING CHART FOR VARIOUS PASTA SHAPES

Pasta Name	Shape of Pasta	Cooking Time for al dente	Pasta Name	Shape of Pasta	Cooking Time for al dente
Lasagna		15 minutes	Ziti		10 minutes
Bow Ties		11 minutes	Fettuccine		8 minutes
Wagon Wheels		11 minutes	Rotini		8 minutes
Linguine		10 minutes	Elbow Macaroni		6 minutes
Rigatoni		10 minutes	Noodles		6 minutes
Spaghetti		10 minutes			