Orecchiette with tomato basil sauce

Recipes by Rudy Litwin

Orecchiette pasta from Puglia

1 cup semolina flour

½ cup water

pinch of salt

Make a well with flour. Pour ¾ of the water in the well and mix together gathering up the flour all around your well. Add the remaining water, again gathering up all the semolina flour and work the dough by stretching the dough with the palm of your hand for about 8 minutes.

Form the dough into a ball and cover with plastic wrap. Allow the dough to sit for ½ hour.

After the dough has rested for at least ½ hour, roll the dough into a large rope until it is about ½ inch in diameter. Cut the dough into ½ long pieces. With a knife pull the dough across your board toward you. The dough will curl up onto the top of the knife. Unfold the piece of dough, turn inside out, put aside to dry. The piece of dough should now resemble the Orecchiette shape, which means “small ears.”

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Tomato Basil sauce

1 pound Orecchiette pasta

2 pints ripe cherry tomatoes, or about 3 cups chopped ripe plum tomatoes (some cooks recommend removing the seeds, saying they give a bitter taste)

2 large garlic cloves, minced

3 Tablespoons olive oil

Sea salt

Cracked black pepper

¼ tsp. red pepper flakes

several whole sprigs of basil (opt.)

¼ cup fresh basil, finely chopped

Freshly grated Pecorino or Parmesan de Parma cheese (optional)

Dice the tomatoes (pieces don’t have to be too small). May sprinkle tomatoes with coarse sea salt to release the juices. Reserve juices. Put the olive oil in a sauce pan or skillet. When the olive oil is hot, add the garlic and cook until lightly browned. Add juices from tomatoes, and simmer to boil off most of the liquid. Add the tomatoes and red pepper flakes, and cook for only a few minutes (large, unchopped sprigs of basil can be added at this time for flavor). Salt to taste.

To Serve

Boil a large pot of water. Add a “handful” of salt to add flavor and lower the boiling point. Add the Orecchiette and cook until al dente. Drain, keeping a small cup of the pasta water to adjust sauce if needed.

Taste sauce and season with additional salt if needed.

Add sauce to pasta and stir to combine. Top with grated cheese, cracked black pepper, and fresh, finely chopped basil.

Serve hot.

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