

Homemade Pasta With Ricotta Cheese

Step 1: Make your Basic Tomato Sauce

3 28oz cans whole peeled tomatoes

1 Onion, skinned and cut in half

3 garlic cloves

¼ cup good olive oil

Salt and pepper to taste

Drain tomatoes, reserving the liquid. Using a food mill, food processor or blender, process the tomatoes until they are of a medium consistency. No large chunks, but retaining a texture that you would enjoy on your pasta. Don't liquefy the tomatoes else your sauce will be without character. Place the processed tomatoes into a saucepan, and take all reserved juices and add water to them to make four cups total liquid. Add this four cups of juice and water to the pan, along with the onion, garlic, olive oil, salt and pepper. Simmer for 3 hours at a medium heat until your sauce has reached a good consistency. Some like it loose, some like it tight – just cook your sauce until you think it's going to have the perfect texture for you and your family.

While your sauce is cooking, move to step 2.

Step 2: Make your Pasta

4 cups all-purpose flour

4 eggs

1 teaspoon coarse salt

2 12oz bags frozen spinach, thawed, drained, and finely chopped

Place the flour in a mound on your work surface, creating a well in the center. Into the center place your drained and chopped spinach, eggs, and salt. With a fork, work the eggs, salt and spinach together to form a slurry. Slowly incorporate flour into the egg and spinach mixture until a dough forms. Once the dough has come together, use a bench scraper or other hard utensil to gather the ingredients into a ball. Knead the dough, adding additional flour as necessary to ensure that it does not stay sticky, for about 10 minutes. Once you have an elastic dough and have kneaded it sufficiently, allow it to rest under a moist towel or plastic wrap for 30 minutes. This will allow the flour to be absorbed into the dough and for the dough to relax. You are now ready to roll your pasta.

While your pasta dough is resting, move to step 3.

Step 3: Make your ricotta

½ gallon whole milk

2 cups half-and-half

pinch coarse salt

¼ cup squeezed lemon Juice

In a large, heavy nonreactive saucepan over medium-high heat, stir together the milk, half-and-half and salt and bring to a full boil, stirring occasionally to prevent scorching. Turn off the heat and add the lemon juice. Stir until the mixture has separated into thick curds and a cloudy liquid (the whey).

Line a large colander with cheesecloth or a towel, and set over a large bowl. Gently ladle the curds and whey into the colander and let drain for about 15 minutes (you may also wring the excess whey out of the cheese by gathering and applying pressure to the towel for a firmer cheese). Place the ricotta in a bowl and set it aside, covered, until it is ready to serve dinner.

Step 4: Roll your pasta

Roll your pasta according to the manufacturers instructions for your machine; for this recipe we rolled thicker pasta sheets and cut them by hand. Whether you choose to cut your pasta by hand or run it through your machine's cutters, give the dough sheets time to rest prior to cutting. A slightly drier sheet of pasta is infinitely easier to cut into noodles. It is important to remember to develop the gluten in your dough, a process facilitated again at the time of rolling. The more you roll and re-roll your pasta sheets through the machine, the more gluten you will develop and certainly more texture. A toothsome bite is the hallmark of good pasta.

Once your pasta is rolled, cut and into noodles (we made papardelle), you're set to go. Onto the final step!

Step 5: Cook and assemble your meal

Boil your fresh pasta in heavily salted water (it should have enough salt to taste of the sea) for about 2 to 3 minutes, it will cook quickly. Drain your pasta, place it in a large serving bowl and top with dollops of your tomato sauce, followed by a healthy drizzle of good olive oil. Upon this colorful heap place mounds of fresh ricotta followed by a sprinkling of coarse salt and crushed red pepper flakes. Dinner is served! Accompany this with a fresh salad lightly dressed, and your family will adore you.

This simple dinner, created with fresh flavors and ingredients, will make a lovely presentation and provide you with great inspiration. I hope you like it as much as I did! Happy eating!

-OurLocaltopia 2013-



www.ourlocaltopia.com