



# Culinary Craftwork Newsletter: September 2011

## Pasta! Pasta!

### Introduction

This issue of the newsletter focuses on pasta, both fresh and dried, and features four recipes: **Fresh Semolina and Egg Pasta Dough (Page 4)**; **Fettuccine with Tomatoes & Kalamata Olives (Page 6)**; **Linguine Vongole with Clams (Page 9)**; and **Bucatini all'Amatriciana (Page 11)**.

Culinary Craftwork is my business, which specializes in offering private and group cooking classes, as well as personal chef services and small-scale catering. The Culinary Craftwork experience is different in that the classes I offer are fully customizable to what you want to learn. I teach the classes in your own home at a time that is convenient for you. And I do all the shopping.

*It is my mission to give you the tools you need to prepare meals that will seduce you with savor and wow your guests.*

My website contains many sample menus that focus on building different skills, but I am happy to partner with you and come up with something just for you. The classes are fun, informal, and informative—and you get to eat!

The Culinary Craftwork newsletter is a bi-monthly publication that focuses on seasonal fare with recipes and pictures. My newsletter also includes a section called "Ask the Chef," so please don't be shy—email me with your questions.

I invite you to view my previous [newsletters](#) and [recipes](#).

Visit me on [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#).  



### Professional In-home Cooking Classes

Culinary Craftwork offers professionally taught in-home cooking classes by a chef with over 20 years' experience in restaurants and catering.

The classes are designed to build basic skills and boost confidence in the kitchen. I teach the classes in your own home, offer themed menus, cooking class parties and catered dinner parties.

Full class descriptions and prices are available on my website.

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## Common Pasta Types



**Cavatappi**



**Penne Rigate**



**Farfalle**



**Tri-color Fusilli**



Who doesn't love a good bowl of pasta? Hot or cold, Italian style or Asian noodles, there are few foods more satisfying on a variety of levels. You certainly don't have to be Italian to enjoy making and eating pasta. It is estimated that Italians eat over sixty pounds of pasta per person, per year easily out-eating Americans, who consume about twenty pounds per person.

I remember hearing, long ago, that Marco Polo was responsible for bringing pasta home to the Italian states from China. New evidence shows that some types of pasta were in use long before Marco Polo. In fact, the Arab invasions of the 8<sup>th</sup> century are now credited with having brought dried noodles to Sicily. This early pasta was an ideal staple for Sicily and it quickly spread to the mainland since durum wheat thrives in Italy's climate. Italy is still a major producer of this hard wheat, used to make the all-important semolina flour, though much of the flour is now imported, as the demand exceeds the supply.

By the 1300's dried pasta was very popular for its nutrition and long shelf life, making it ideal for long ship voyages. Pasta made it around the globe during the voyages of discovery a century later. By that time different shapes of pasta appeared and new technology made pasta easier to make. The marriage of pasta with tomatoes (in red sauce, or "gravy") did not take place until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, however.

Nowadays, pasta is found virtually everywhere in either dry (pasta secca) or fresh (pasta fresca) form. By law in Italy, dried pasta must be made with 100% durum semolina flour and water, though fresh pasta can be made from various types of flour with or without eggs. There are more than 350 different shapes and varieties of dried pasta, though here in the U.S. we only see a fraction of them.

Dried pasta, especially the more complex shapes (such as radiatore) are designed for grabbing and holding onto sauces. Dried tube pastas (ziti, rigatoni or penne) often have ridges on the surface to hold onto the pasta sauce as well. These ridges and bumps are created during the extrusion process, when the pasta is forced from a copper mold and cut to desired length before drying. These molds, while expensive, are favored for making the best dried pasta. However most producers worldwide use steel molds that produce pasta that is too smooth to hold onto sauce. Fortunately more pasta makers outside of Italy are starting to use the older style copper molds.

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After the pasta is cut it is dried at a specific temperature for a period of time. This is an area where mass produced pasta falls short of good Italian pasta made the correct way. The mass produced pastas are dried at very high temperatures for a shorter time than quality pasta. Traditional pasta is allowed to dry more slowly, up to 50 hours, at a much lower temperature. After the pasta is fully dried it is packaged. The result is a product with a much better mouth-feel, quicker cooking time, and superior sauce holding capability.

Essentially all pasta starts out as fresh pasta but some is made to be eaten "soft." Fresh pasta can be made with slightly different ingredients than the dried variety. Many northern regions of Italy use all-purpose flour and eggs while southern Italy generally makes theirs from semolina and water but it depends upon the recipe. Fresh pasta is not necessarily better than dried pasta—it is just different. Some types of pasta are only used fresh, while others are exclusively sold dried.

Pasta should be cooked until it is "al dente," firm to the tooth yet tender. Many Americans cook dried pasta until it is too soft; a minute or two less of cooking time will give you a more authentic Italian style pasta. Fresh pasta takes even less time to be cooked to perfection. Some fresh pastas, for example angel hair pasta, cannot be cooked "al dente," but thicker cuts (such as pappardelle and fettuccine) can be cooked until firm to the tooth. A key to cooking perfect pasta is to use a large pot and plenty of water and salt; this will stop the pasta from sticking and will also ensure that every inch of pasta will be cooked through.

Some people add a little olive oil to the cooking water to stop the pasta from sticking and while that works well for larger pasta like lasagna, it is not necessary if you use a large pot, plenty of water and remember to stir the pasta. When draining the pasta remember to save about a cup of the water in the pot, this starchy water will add a little body to whatever sauce you choose. Never rinse off the pasta after cooking unless you're making a pasta salad. Washing off all that starch and salt will kill any flavor your pasta once had.

When it comes to pairing sauce with pasta, it is really a matter of personal preference unless you are following a traditional recipe. A good rule of thumb to remember is that simple pasta shapes work best with simple sauces while complex shapes are ideal for thicker sauces and ragùs. However, it is important that you use high quality pasta cooked properly to ensure authenticity.

I recently purchased a hand-cranked pasta machine at Sur la Table and have been having great fun making pasta at home. I also bought an inexpensive laundry rack at Target for hanging up the pasta to dry. Although it is possible to roll out the dough and cut it by hand, feeding it through the series of rollers is a vast improvement.

I practiced at home for a bit, then gave a class in making fettuccine to a couple of teenage girls who wanted a hands-on experience making pasta for their families. What fun! I was fortunate to get a couple of pictures of the girls at work and have shared them here in this newsletter.

We dressed the fettuccine with a pesto Genovese (with garlic, olive oil, basil, parsley, pignoli nuts and parmigiano) and a touch of cream. It was divine.

And now, on to the recipes....

## Making fettuccine



Fresh egg fettuccine



Fresh spinach fettuccine



Ashwini rolls out the dough using the pasta machine.



## Semolina flour adds texture and flavor.



Mixing and kneading the pasta dough by hand is easy and fun, but you can also do it in a standing mixer or even a food processor.



**Hand-cranked pasta machine**

## Fresh Semolina & Egg Pasta Dough



The following recipe calls for a measure of semolina flour, which adds texture and “tooth” to the pasta, but you can make a more tender pasta using only all-purpose flour. Mixing and kneading the pasta dough by hand is easy and fun, but you can also do it in a standing mixer, such as a Kitchenaid, or even in a food processor. After drying the pasta, carefully remove it from the rack, as it is very delicate and if left to dry for too long, it will become brittle. Cook the pasta, or wrap and refrigerate it. It will keep for about a week.

## Fresh Semolina & Egg Pasta Dough

Serves 8

### Ingredients

- 2-2/3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1-1/3 cups semolina flour
- 1 large pinch salt
- 6 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

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## Fresh Semolina & Egg Pasta Dough (Cont.)

### Directions

1. Thoroughly sift together all-purpose flour, semolina flour, and a generous pinch of salt.
2. On a clean surface, make a mountain out of flour mixture then make a deep well in the center.
3. Break the eggs into the well and add olive oil.
4. Whisk the eggs gently with a fork, gradually incorporating flour from the sides of the well.
5. When the mixture becomes too thick to mix with a fork, begin kneading with your hands.
6. Knead dough for 8 to 10 minutes, until it is smooth and supple.
7. Dust dough and work surface with semolina as needed to keep dough from becoming sticky.
8. Wrap dough in plastic and allow it to rest at room temperature for 30 minutes.
9. Roll out dough with a pasta machine or a rolling pin to desired thickness.
10. Cut into your favorite style of noodle or stuff with your favorite filling to make ravioli. Hang the pasta up to dry for 30-60 minutes.
11. Bring water to a boil in a large pot, then add 4 teaspoons salt.
12. Cook pasta until tender but not mushy, 2 to 8 minutes depending on thickness. Drain immediately and toss with your favorite sauce.

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### Making Fettuccine Cont.

Using a pasta machine, roll the pasta sheets to desired thickness.



Feed the pasta sheets through the cutter.



Simi hangs the fettuccine up to dry.

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**Fresh plum tomatoes provide a light, vibrant flavor.**



Fresh plum tomatoes, also known as “Roma” tomatoes, are meaty and packed with flavor; they are ideal for simple, quickly prepared pasta sauces and can be left skin on, or blanched and shocked, skin removed.



Kalamata olives, imported from Greece, lend a rich, meaty, winey flavor.

## Fresh Fettuccine with Tomatoes & Kalamata Olives



Make this in the summer with fresh, ripe Roma tomatoes, winey, briny Kalamata olives and lots of fresh basil. You can blanch, shock and skin the tomatoes, or leave the skins on (they soften up as they cook). This is a simple dish that can be made in 15 minutes or less.

## Fresh Fettuccine with Tomatoes & Kalamata Olives

Serves 4

### Ingredients

- 1 lb. fresh fettuccine
- 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 4-6 medium garlic cloves, sliced
- 4 cups chopped fresh plum (Roma) tomatoes
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp freshly ground pepper
- ½ cup quartered, pitted Kalamata olives
- ½ cup lightly packed shredded fresh basil
- ¼ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

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## Fresh Fettuccine with Tomatoes & Kalamata Olives (Cont.)

### Directions

1. Cook fettuccine in large pot of boiling salted water until al dente; drain, reserving a bit of the cooking water.
2. Meanwhile, heat oil in large skillet over medium heat until warm. Add garlic; cook gently until fragrant and golden. Stir in the tomatoes, salt and pepper. Increase heat to medium-high; cook 2 to 3 minutes or until tomatoes begin to soften. Crush the tomatoes with a potato masher until sauce is almost smooth with some pieces of tomato. Add olives and half of the basil; cook 2 to 3 minutes or until slightly thickened.
3. Toss the fettuccine with sauce, a bit of the cooking water and the remaining basil. Place in large pasta bowl or on a serving platter; sprinkle with cheese and garnish with basil.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Use a large pasta pot to boil the pasta; add plenty of salt, and stir well.





**Garlic and Italian flat-leaf parsley are key flavors.**



## Linguine Vongole (with clams)



The appeal of this dish is undeniable. Quickly prepared, with fresh, vibrant flavors, it is clammy without being “fishy.” Typically, linguine vongole is prepared with a “white” clam sauce (meaning no tomatoes), but a small amount of fresh tomatoes adds a richness and body to the sauce, which is little more than extra virgin olive oil with garlic and hot pepper flakes. You can use fresh or dried linguine (I prefer the dried variety cooked “al dente.” Note: Italians eschew cheese on seafood pastas.

## Linguine Vongole (with clams)

Serves 4

### Ingredients

- 1 lb. linguine
- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 6 medium garlic cloves, sliced
- 3/4 tsp. hot red pepper flakes
- 1/4 tsp. dried oregano (optional)
- 1 1/2 cups chopped fresh plum tomatoes (optional)
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp freshly ground pepper
- 1/3 cup dry white wine
- 1/3 cup bottled clam juice
- 2 lb. cockles, Manila, or littleneck clams, scrubbed well
- 2 Tbs. cold butter, cut into small pieces
- 1/3 cup chopped Italian parsley

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## Linguine Vongole (Cont.)

### Directions

1. Heat oil in a 5- to 6-quart heavy pot over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking, then sauté onion, stirring, until golden, about 4 minutes.
2. Add garlic, red pepper flakes, and oregano and cook, stirring occasionally, until garlic is golden, about 2 minutes. Stir in wine and clam juice and tomatoes, if using. Boil, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until slightly reduced, about 3 minutes.
3. Cook pasta in a 6- to 8-quart pot of boiling salted water until al dente, then drain in a colander. While pasta is cooking, stir clams into sauce and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, until clams open wide, 4 to 6 minutes. (Discard any clams that have not opened.)
4. Add pasta and butter to clams along with parsley and salt & black pepper to taste, then toss with sauce until combined well.

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### The best clams to use:



Manila Clams



Cockles



Littleneck Clams

Use bucatini or perciatelli for this recipe. De Cecco is a good brand to look for.



Bucatini



Perciatelli

## Bucatini all'Amatriciana



At its best, bucatini all'amatriciana is a simple "peasant" dish with few ingredients that pack a wallop of taste. Bucatini is a "fat" type of spaghetti with a hollow interior. Perciatelli is not quite as fat, but still has a hollow interior. It is worth the effort to seek out this type of pasta, although the sauce would be good on traditional spaghetti or fettuccine. I like to garnish this dish with shredded basil and flat-leaf (Italian) parsley.

## Bucatini all'Amatriciana

Serves 4

### Ingredients

- 1 lb. bucatini or perciatelli pasta
- 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ lb. pancetta, diced
- 2 medium garlic cloves, minced
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 28-oz can Italian plum tomatoes
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp freshly ground pepper
- ¼ cup lightly packed shredded fresh basil
- ¼ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano or Pecorino Romano cheese

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## Bucatini all'Amatriciana (Cont.)

### Directions

1. Heat olive oil in large saucepan over medium heat. Add the pancetta and cook, stirring often, until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Add the onion and sauté until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and sauté until golden about 1 minute longer.
2. Crush the tomatoes and add with juices to pan. Add salt & pepper and a little water. Bring to a simmer and cook uncovered, stirring occasionally, until the sauce thickens, about 15 minutes.
3. While the sauce is cooking, bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add 1 tablespoon of salt and the bucatini. Cook uncovered over high heat until al dente.
4. Drain the pasta, then add the pasta and 1/4 cup of the cheese and the basil to the sauce in the saucepan and toss well. Transfer to warm serving plates and serve immediately with the remaining Pecorino Romano on the side.

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## Pancetta



Pancetta is a type of Italian bacon, that is cured, not smoked, and typically rolled. You can substitute thick-cut smoked bacon, and it will taste good, but different (and less authentic).

## Snap Review: Pasta Pomodoro Santana Row, San Jose, CA



[See what others have to say about Pasta Pomodoro Santana Row](#)

Admittedly, we were reluctant to review yet another chain restaurant. But, since the topic in this month's newsletter was pasta, we could not bring ourselves to overlook Pasta Pomodoro.

If you don't mind slightly overcooked pasta, Pasta Pomodoro offers decent fare. After a surprisingly good Caesar salad, we had linguine vongole and baked rigatoni with meat sauce and mozzarella. Both were good, not great.

We have visited the restaurant several times in the past, and found the food to be consistently decent, but it could be better for the price. While Pasta Pomodoro is fairly inexpensive as restaurants go, it is not cheap, and one wishes that it were just a tad better.

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## Ask the Chef



I love hearing from people who have read the newsletter or taken one of my classes.

I enjoy the opportunity to answer your questions in this general forum, and I hope that my advice is helpful.

Please continue to send me your questions, comments and ideas. They really make my day.

And don't forget—you can post your questions on the [Culinary Craftwork Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)



Thank you!

**Chef Alyssa**

## Ask the Chef (Q&A)

### Perfecting scrambled eggs

*Naomi asks, "What is the correct way to make scrambled eggs?"*

Reply: Most people tend to overcook eggs. Here's what I do—I start with three eggs, and whisk them together in a small bowl with a tablespoon of milk or heavy cream, salt and pepper. I heat up a non-stick skillet with a tablespoon of butter till the butter is sizzling and the foam begins to subside. Then I add the eggs and stir with a rubber spatula till soft clumps form and the mixture stops looking wet. Turn onto a plate and serve immediately.

### Hard-boiling eggs

*Larry asks, "I was involved in a heated discussion on Twitter the other day about how best to cook a hard-boiled egg. Everyone had a different way and everyone swore that their way was the only correct way. Is there a "best" way to hard boil an egg and what is it?"*

Reply: I don't know what the "best" way to hard boil an egg is, but this is what I do. Start with eggs that are at room temperature. Place them in a pot and cover with approximately one inch of cool water. Turn on the heat to medium-high, and bring the water to a boil. Turn off the heat, cover the eggs and set a timer for 11 minutes. Remove the eggs to an ice water bath for 5 to 10 minutes, drain and peel or refrigerate for later use.

### Seeking veal saltimbocca

*Jen asks, "My husband tells me he once had a wonderful veal dish in an Italian restaurant on Cape Cod, but he hasn't seen it on any menu since then. He thinks it was called "saltimbocca." What is it and is it difficult to make or can a housewife think of making it?"*

Reply: I remember an old-time Italian restaurant in NYC that made veal **saltimbocca** alla Romana. I was just a kid, but I loved it. You can substitute chicken for the veal, and America's Test Kitchen did a segment on streamlined saltimbocca in Season 9 (you can Google it—there are a ton of recipes on the internet). It is quite easy to make—the key is using good ingredients—good prosciutto and fresh sage.

### Selecting the right pie pan

*Lily asks, "What kind of pie pan do you recommend?"*

Reply: Pie pans can be made of many things—ceramic, aluminum, glass, stoneware—my personal preference is for glass. That way I can see when the bottom of the pie is cooked. Some pie pans are deeper than others, however; so that is something to keep in mind if you are baking a deep-dish pie. Likewise, if you are making a key lime pie, you might want to go with a shallower pie pan. I have several pie pans for different types of pie. I also prefer a 10-inch pie pan to the typical 9-inch pan, as you get nicer slices from a larger pan.