

Autumn Pasta with Blue Cheese and Nuts

By Donal Skehan

“House and Garden” (UK version)

Serves: 4

Ingredients

1 pumpkin or autumn squash (about 1kg/2lb 4oz), peeled, deseeded and sliced
3–4 sprigs of thyme
1 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp salted butter
2 onions, thinly sliced
350g (12oz) pasta shapes, such as conchiglie or rigatoni
100g (3½oz) blue cheese
75g (3oz) walnuts, toasted and roughly crushed
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
Best-quality extra virgin olive oil, to serve

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F
2. Place the pumpkin on a large baking sheet with the thyme sprigs and toss in the olive oil until all the pieces are coated. Season generously with salt and pepper. Roast in the oven for 40 minutes, or until tender and caramelized at the edges. Once cooked, keep warm.
3. While the pumpkin cooks, place a large heavy-based frying pan (skillet) over a medium–high heat and add the butter. Add the onions and season generously, tossing to coat completely in the melted butter. Reduce the heat and cook gently until the onions are sweet and caramelized, about 10–15 minutes.
4. Towards the end of the pumpkin cooking time, bring a large pan of water to the boil and generously season with salt. Once boiling, add the pasta and cook until al dente. Drain and reserve a cup of the starchy cooking water for use in the sauce.
5. Increase the heat back up under the pan with the onions, then add the reserved pasta water and bring to a steady simmer. Meanwhile, mash half the cooked pumpkin and add this to the onions. Crumble in almost all of the blue cheese (keep a little back to serve) and stir until you have a smooth, creamy sauce. Working quickly, add the pasta to the pan and stir through until completely coated.
6. Serve the pasta hot in warmed plates topped with the remaining pumpkin slices and blue cheese. Sprinkle with toasted crushed walnuts and top with a generous drizzle of the best-quality extra virgin olive oil you have to hand and a last seasoning of sea salt and black pepper.