

Pasta e Fagioli
Pasta and Beans
Naples at Table, Arthur Schwartz © 1998

Serves: 4

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus ¼ – ½ cup more to make the Hot Pepper Oil*
2 large cloves garlic, finely minced
1/8 teaspoon red pepper flakes
3 canned and peeled plum tomatoes
½ teaspoon salt

2½ – 3 cups [cooked cannellini beans](#), with enough of their cooking liquid to barely cover them

6 ounces large tubular pasta, such as zitoni or rigatoni, or a wide, flat pasta, such as mafaldine (manfrede in Neapolitan or fettuccia riccia, or pasta mista (mischiata), or ziti, penne or ditali

Hot pepper oil

1. In a 2-1/2 to 3-quart saucepan or stovetop casserole, combine the olive oil, the garlic and the hot pepper flakes over medium-low heat. Let the garlic sizzle gently in the oil.
2. As soon as the garlic begins to color, cut in or crush the tomatoes directly in the pot. (You can chop the tomatoes apart, then put them in the pot, but the Neapolitan home way is to roughly cut them directly into the pot, or crush each tomato by squeezing it in your hand and letting the pieces fall into the pot.
3. Add, salt, and with a wooden spoon, crush or break up the larger pieces of tomato. Increase the heat slightly and sizzle the tomato in the oil for about 5 minutes. This is to let the beans absorb the flavor of the sauce and cook a little further.
4. Stir in the beans and their liquid. Bring to a boil, stirring frequently, then adjust the heat so the beans simmer gently for minutes. This is to let the beans absorb the flavor of the sauce and cook a little further.
5. While the beans simmer, crush some of them against the side of the pot. Taste for salt and add as necessary.
6. Remove from the heat until the pasta is cooked.
7. Cook the pasta in plenty of boiling salted water until just done or slightly underdone. Drain the pasta, saving ½ cup of the cooking water in case you need it later.
8. Stir the cooked pasta into the beans and return to medium heat. Let simmer gently for 1 or 2 minutes or longer, until the pasta is a little past al dente. If the pasta was slightly undercooked to start, you may need to add a spoonful or more of pasta cooking water to finish its cooking with the beans.
9. When the pasta is cooked, remove from the heat, cover the pot and let stand for 5 to 10 minutes. Serve hot.

To reheat: Pasta and beans can be reheated in a covered casserole in the oven or in a microwave.

Variations:

Various herbs might be used to flavor the dish. Add a couple of bay leaves and/or sprigs of rosemary to the pot of simmering beans, or cook one, the other, or both in the oil with the garlic. Sage is also an excellent seasoning for beans, but it is not a favored Campanian combination.

Cubes or slices of potato are also sometimes cooked along with the pasta, then combined with the beans.

Hot Pepper Oil

Break whole small dried chilies into extra-virgin olive oil, seeds and all, let them infuse the oil with their sting. You can also use red pepper flakes depending on their quality, can work well too. It takes just several hours before the oil is peppery enough for use. Proportions aren't important, if it's too hot, add more olive oil.

Arthur uses extra-virgin olive oil and notes it will not last as long as unflavored oil.