



Rich, lush and full of umami, Penne alla Vodka is the perfect dish for a romantic Valentine's dinner, and you won't believe how easy it is to make. Sarah Nasello / The Forum

Penne alla Vodka

Serves: 4 as an entree; 6-8 as a first course

Ingredients:

- 1 pound penne pasta (or other short, tubular noodle)
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 ounces pancetta, diced
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped (about 2 cups)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- ¾ cup vodka
- 1 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 to 2 cups water
- ¾ cup heavy cream
- ¼ cup Grana Padano or Parmesan cheese, plus more to garnish
- 1 tablespoon fresh Italian parsley, stems removed, finely chopped

Directions:

Fill a large pot with at least 4 quarts of water. Add 1 tablespoon kosher salt and bring to a boil over high heat. Add pasta and cook until al dente, according to the directions on the package. When ready, drain the pasta and set aside until ready to toss with the sauce.

As the pasta cooks, heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the pancetta and cook, stirring occasionally until crispy, about 5 minutes.

Add the onion, garlic and crushed red pepper. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring often, until the onion is soft and translucent, about 5 to 6 minutes.

Add the vodka and cook on medium-low, stirring occasionally until it is nearly all evaporated, about 5 minutes. Most of the alcohol content will burn off during this stage.

Add the crushed tomatoes, salt and pepper and stir to combine. Stir in 1 cup water and cook over medium heat until the sauce reaches a simmer, then reduce to medium-low and simmer for 12 minutes. The sauce will thicken during this time and can be thinned out if desired by adding more water, ¼ cup at a time, until desired consistency is achieved.

Stir in cream and cook over low heat for 2 minutes. Add cooked pasta and grated cheese and toss until noodles are evenly coated. Taste and adjust seasoning as desired.

Serve with more grated cheese, a sprinkling of chopped parsley and a good loaf of crusty bread to sop up the sauce.

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"Home with the Lost Italian" is a weekly column written by Sarah Nasello featuring recipes by her husband, Tony Nasello. The couple owned Sarello's in Moorhead and lives in Fargo with their son, Giovanni. Readers can reach them at sarahnasello@gmail.com.