



PastaMania #5. "Bucatini Cacio e Pepe" (Bucatini with Cheese and Pepper)

(June 19, 2014)



Traditionally a Roman dish, "Cacio e pepe" is also popular in other regions throughout central Italy. The name "cheese and pepper" refers to the two basic ingredients of this simple yet tasty dish. But, as you will soon discover, there is a third "miracle ingredient" not mentioned in the name.

INGREDIENTS

Serves 4

- First you'll need 24 oz De Cecco bucatini
- 3 teaspoons freshly ground pepper



- 12 oz aged pecorino romano, grated

PREPARATION

- This preparation starts with the pasta, not with the sauce.
- Making a good Cacio e Pepe is perhaps the best way to show how vital excellent pasta is to Italian cuisine.
- So, first check to make sure the bucatini is made in Italy with durum wheat semolina. The best Italian pasta stays firm after cooking and has a rough porous texture that the sauce sticks to better.
- When the water comes to a boil, add coarse salt and toss in bucatini, stirring occasionally so it doesn't stick.
- Meanwhile, grind the pepper over a deep pan and turn the heat up.
- Use whole pepper grains and grind them yourself. It's more flavourful than pre-ground pepper.
- Once your pasta is almost ready, spoon out a 1/2 cup of cooking water, add it to the pepper and stir. Reserved pasta water contains essential starch that can be used to adjust the consistency of your sauce. It is actually a miracle ingredient!
- Cook bucatini for about 12 minutes.
- If you cook it longer, Italians won't like it!
- For this specific recipe, the pasta must be very "al dente"—or firm to the bite—for it will have to cook in its own water for a little while longer.
- When the bucatini is ready, don't strain it in a colander—just remove it with a large slotted spoon and add to the saucepan.
- Mix for two minutes, letting it cook through in the water and pepper.
- Turn off the flame, add pecorino and stir, letting it melt.
- Add pasta water until you have reached desired consistency.
- Bucatini cacio e pepe should be paired with a red wine, preferably from the Roman region of Lazio. Try Castelli Romani Rosso or Circeo Rosso, or their better-known counterpart, Montepulciano, from nearby Abruzzo.

... AND REMEMBER: To make an excellent pasta dish, use excellent pasta!

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