



Italian-Style Tomato Pasta Salads

Raw tomato sauce is a refreshing alternative to traditional dressings for pasta salad--but is it necessary to peel and seed the tomatoes? And what about marinating?

The Problem: Italian-style pasta salads are not the pallid, chilled versions most Americans are used to. Rather, they consist of hot pasta tossed with a raw tomato sauce, then cooled to room temperature before serving. Unfortunately, for all of their authenticity, these dishes can be dull-flavored and watery.

The Goal: A full-flavored, refreshing tomato pasta salad, with the tomatoes, garlic, basil, and olive oil clinging to the pasta strands.

The Solution: Seeding the tomatoes eliminates excess juice, which otherwise settles at the bottom of the bowl, taking with it the other flavors of the sauce. Making the sauce at the last minute allows the flavors to meld perfectly, without turning dull or losing the sweet, bright flavor of fresh tomatoes, as can happen when they're marinated.

Pasta salad can be served right after saucing or be allowed to sit for half an hour or so to cool to room temperature. After cooling, it can left out up to four hours before eating if stored in a bowl tightly sealed with plastic wrap. After four hours, the pasta will start to soften. The refrigerator is not the place for this pasta salad; it irrevocably damages the flavor and texture of the ripe tomatoes.

Pasta Salad with Fresh Tomatoes and Basil

Use only the ripest, most flavorful round tomatoes you can find. Avoid plum tomatoes because they are too firm and tend not to soften, even with the heat of the just-cooked pasta. The tomatoes can be diced a couple hours in advance, but to prevent the garlic from becoming too pungent and the salt from drawing out the tomatoes' juices, wait until the pasta is cooking to add the seasonings to the tomatoes. Short, stubby pasta shapes such as orecchiette, fusilli, and farfalle (bow ties) are the best choice to catch juicy bits of sauce.

Serves 6 to 8 as a side dish

Table salt

1 pound pasta (*see note*)

2 pounds ripe tomatoes , *cored, seeded, and cut into 1/2-inch dice*

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium clove garlic , *minced*

1/4 cup shredded fresh basil leaves

Ground black pepper

1. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large soup kettle. Add 1 tablespoon salt and pasta. Cook until pasta is al dente (refer to package directions; cooking times will vary with different shapes). Drain well.

2. While pasta is cooking, toss together tomatoes, olive oil, garlic, basil, 3/4 teaspoon salt, and pepper to taste in large bowl. Add drained pasta to tomatoes and toss well. Serve immediately, or, if desired, cool to room temperature before serving, about 30 minutes. (Can be covered with plastic wrap and kept at room temperature for up to 4 hours.)

Pasta Salad with Tomatoes, Olives, and Capers

Use only the ripest, most flavorful round tomatoes you can find. Avoid plum tomatoes because they are too firm and tend not to soften, even with the heat of the just-cooked pasta. The tomatoes can be diced a couple hours in advance, but to prevent the garlic from becoming too pungent and the salt from drawing out the tomatoes' juices, wait until the pasta is cooking to add the seasonings to the tomatoes. Short, stubby pasta shapes such as orecchiette, fusilli, and farfalle (bow ties) are the best choice to catch juicy bits of sauce.

Serves 6 to 8 as a side dish

Table salt

1 pound pasta (*see note*)

2 pounds ripe tomatoes , *cored, seeded, and cut into 1/2-inch dice*

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1/3 cup pitted kalamata olives (*sliced*), or other brine-cured black olives

2 tablespoons capers (*drained*)

1 medium clove garlic , *minced*

1/4 cup shredded fresh basil leaves

Ground black pepper

1. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large soup kettle. Add 1 tablespoon salt and pasta. Cook until pasta is al dente (refer to package directions; cooking times will vary with different shapes). Drain well.

2. While pasta is cooking, toss together tomatoes, olive oil, olives, capers, garlic, basil, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and pepper to taste in large bowl. Add drained pasta to tomatoes and toss well. Serve immediately, or, if desired, cool to room temperature before serving, about 30 minutes. (Can be covered with plastic wrap and kept at room temperature for up to 4 hours.)

Pasta Salad with Tomatoes and Fresh Mozzarella

Use only the ripest, most flavorful round tomatoes you can find. Avoid plum tomatoes because they are too firm and tend not to soften, even with the heat of the just-cooked pasta. The tomatoes can be diced a couple hours in advance, but to prevent the garlic from becoming too pungent and the salt from drawing out the tomatoes' juices, wait until the pasta is cooking to add the seasonings to the tomatoes. Short, stubby pasta shapes such as orecchiette, fusilli, and farfalle (bow ties) are the best choice to catch juicy bits of sauce.

Serves 6 to 8 as a side dish

Table salt

1 pound pasta (*see note*)

2 pounds ripe tomatoes , *cored, seeded, and cut into 1/2-inch dice*

6 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese , *cut into small dice*

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium clove garlic , *minced*

1/4 cup shredded fresh basil leaves *shredded*

Ground black pepper

1. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large soup kettle. Add 1 tablespoon salt and pasta. Cook until pasta is al dente (refer to package directions; cooking times will vary with different shapes). Drain well.

2. While pasta is cooking, toss together tomatoes, cheese, olive oil, garlic, basil, 3/4 teaspoon salt, and pepper to taste in large bowl. Add drained pasta to tomatoes and toss well. Serve immediately, or, if desired, cool to room temperature before serving, about 30 minutes. (Can be covered with plastic wrap and kept at room temperature for up to 4 hours.)

