

## Penne with Red Pepper Pesto

**3** red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and cut into ¼-inch-wide strips (5 cups)

**3** tablespoons [extra-virgin olive oil](#)

Salt and pepper

**1** small onion, chopped

**1** plum tomato, cored, seeded, and chopped

**1**/**3** cup chopped fresh basil

**1**/**2**—**3**/**4** teaspoon red pepper flakes

**1** teaspoon garlic, minced to paste

**1**/**2** cup whole-milk [ricotta cheese](#)

**1**/**4** cup [grated Parmesan cheese](#), plus extra for serving

**1** teaspoon [white wine vinegar](#)

**1** pound penne

### Serves 4

Other short, tubular pastas can be used. A rasp-style grater makes quick work of turning the garlic into a paste. Adjust the amount of red pepper flakes depending on how spicy you want the dish. For our recipe for Penne with Red Pepper Pesto (Pesto Calabrese) for Two, go to [CooksIllustrated.com/aug16](http://CooksIllustrated.com/aug16).

1. Toss two-thirds of bell peppers with 1 tablespoon oil and ¼ teaspoon salt in 12-inch nonstick skillet. Cover and place over medium-low heat. Cook, stirring occasionally, until bell peppers are softened and just starting to brown, about 15 minutes.
2. Add onion, tomato, basil, pepper flakes, and ½ teaspoon garlic and continue to cook, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until onion is softened and bell peppers are browned in spots, 6 to 7 minutes longer. Remove skillet from heat and let cool for 5 minutes.
3. Place ricotta, Parmesan, remaining one-third of bell peppers, remaining ½ teaspoon garlic, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in bowl of food processor. Add cooked bell pepper mixture and process for 20 seconds. Scrape down sides of bowl. With processor running, add vinegar and remaining 2 tablespoons oil; process for about 20 seconds. Scrape down sides of bowl, then continue to process until smooth, about 20 seconds longer.
4. Meanwhile, bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve ½ cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return it to pot. Add pesto and toss to combine, adjusting consistency with reserved cooking water as needed. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve, passing extra Parmesan separately. Penne with Red Pepper Pesto for Two (Pesto Calabrese)

