

Toasted Pasta Soup

Prep: 15 mins

Cook: 35 mins

Total: 50 mins

Servings: 6 servings

Yield: 2 quarts

This simple soup begins with vegetables, herbs, spices, and raw soup pasta toasted till brown, then is topped with water or broth to cook on the stove top. I love the combination of flavorful broth and the heft of the pasta. Together they make a soup that's comforting and hearty.

When my children were young, I used alphabet pasta and they would eat as they looked for the letters of their names first, and then proceed to other names till the bowls were empty. Even though they're teenagers now, whenever I find alphabet pasta, I make some and they get all nostalgic, and still look for the letters in their names.

Pick Your Pasta

Though you can make it with almost any pasta shape, I'm partial to "soup" pasta. Small and perfect for cooking in liquid, they come in different shapes. My favorite is acini di pepe—tiny, round pasta named after peppercorns. It reminds me of moghrabieh and Israeli couscous in that it has a fantastic texture and a touch more body than alphabet pasta.

Other pastas that you can use include orzo, shaped like rice; seme di melone, which resemble melon or pumpkin seeds; stellette, shaped like stars; and of course, alphabet pasta. You don't have to go out to buy soup pasta—you can use whatever you have at home, as is, or broken into smaller bits.

A Versatile Base for Experimentation

This is a flexible and forgiving recipe so let the instructions be a guide on your journey to flavors and textures that you like. Sometimes we switch up the vegetables, add greens, mix pastas, and season with different spice blends.

The one thing I always do, and recommend you do too, is toast the pasta. It deepens the flavor, and prevents the pasta from going soft too quickly.

How to Serve This Soup

Make this soup all year round, or save it for fall and winter. Serve on its own, or pair with bread or croutons; and top with your favorite pesto—basil, tomato, or a lemony one; or finish with some fresh herbs. Enjoy.

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium carrots, peeled and cut into small dice
- 1 medium onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon fine salt, more to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 dried bay leaves
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves stripped and stalks reserved
- 1 cup small pasta, such as acini di pepe
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/2 teaspoon red chili flakes, or to taste, optional
- 8 cups water or low sodium vegetable broth
- 1 scant teaspoon Cajun seasoning, or to taste

Steps to Make It

1. Gather the ingredients.
2. Add the olive oil to a medium pot over medium heat. When the oil shimmers, add the carrots, onions, salt, turmeric, black pepper, and bay leaves.
3. Sauté until the vegetables are coated in the oil, the onions are translucent, and the mixture is tinged yellow, about 5 minutes.
4. Reduce the heat to low. Add the thyme leaves and stalks, and the pasta. Cook, stirring frequently until the pasta is golden, 6 to 8 minutes (the pasta might pop).
5. Add the garlic and chili flakes, if using. Continue to cook, stirring frequently until the garlic is fragrant, about 30 seconds.
6. Add the water or broth and Cajun seasoning. Adjust the mixture with salt, if needed.
7. Cover the pot and bring to the boil. Reduce heat to maintain a simmer, if needed, and continue cooking until the carrots have softened and the pasta is al dente, and doubled in size, 6 to 8 minutes (depending on your pasta).
8. Remove from the heat, and let rest 2 to 3 minutes. Remove and discard the thyme stalks and bay leaves, then serve. The longer the pasta sits, the more it plumps up with the liquid.

Recipe Tips

- When toasting the pasta, stir often to loosen it from the bottom so it toasts evenly and does not burn.
- The pasta softens the longer it sits. If you like yours al dente, eat soon after you've pulled it off the heat.

Make Ahead

You can prep the vegetables ahead of time, and toast the pasta up to 2 days before you cook it.

Recipe Variations

- Feel free to use your favorite vegetables, and change the ratios—celery, corn, and fennel are great options. You can also change the herbs, using rosemary instead of thyme, for example.
- Add a tablespoon of tomato paste to the vegetables as they saute for a tomatoey flavor, or a sauce like pesto or chimichurri for herby notes.
- Season with your favorite spices or blends.
- Add less liquid for a thicker soup.
- Add cooked beans or peas towards the end for another layer of texture.

How to Store

Let cool, then refrigerate for up to 3 days. The pasta will soften a touch, and will absorb the broth. When reheating, add more broth or water as desired.