

Spaghetti alla Nerano (Spaghetti with Zucchini)

By Emiko

This legendary pasta made of spaghetti and fried zucchini was apparently invented in 1952 by Maria Grazia, who owned a restaurant in Nerano that bears her name (and where two of her grandchildren, Lello and Andrea, still work to this day). So many have tried to recreate this seemingly humble dish of pasta and local summer zucchini that it has become known as “Spaghetti alla Nerano” to distinguish it from any other spaghetti with zucchini. The simple ingredients become a dish very quickly—because you must multitask. While the pasta water is boiling, the zucchini are frying. Then the spaghetti is cooking. A quick purée is made out of some of the zucchini, and then it's all tossed together. The result is a fast, exceptionally tasty pasta dish, where the sauce clings to each strand of spaghetti. Don't think the frying or the touch of butter will make this dish heavy—it's not remotely, and the butter helps "mantecare"—that is, to create that clingy sauce that you need.

Serves 4

- 1 clove garlic
- 1/2 cup (125 milliliters) olive oil
- 4 to 5 small zucchini, sliced into very thin rounds
- Salt and pepper
- 11 ounces (320 grams) spaghetti
- 3 ounces (80 grams) grated Provolone del Monaco (or Parmesan)
- Knob of cold, unsalted butter
- Handful of basil leaves

1. Put a large pot of water on to boil for the spaghetti.
2. In a wide skillet over medium-high heat, add the garlic clove and olive oil so the mixture sizzles and the oil gets infused by the garlic. When just golden, remove the garlic and add the zucchini rounds. Toss every now and then, letting the zucchini fry away until tender but not brown.
3. In the meantime, add a teaspoon of salt to the boiling water, then place spaghetti in the pot.
4. Drain the zucchini on paper towels and season with a pinch of salt and some freshly ground pepper. Keep warm. Blend together about a third of the zucchini and about 1/4 cup (60 milliliters) of water from the pot of pasta—I use a glass jar with a handheld blender for this. Pour this purée into a large serving bowl, where you will eventually add all the pasta.
5. When the spaghetti is al dente (take out about 1 minute before the suggested cooking time on the packet), drain, saving about 1/2 cup of the cooking water. Toss the spaghetti into the serving bowl with the purée, the grated cheese, the fried zucchini, and the cold butter. Quickly toss, using tongs or a spatula to help you. You want spaghetti to be silky and just coated with the purée, not dry but not watery either. If it's too dry, add cooking water a little at a time. Top with the basil leaves and serve immediately.