

Pasta alla Trapanese with Almond Pesto and Eggplant

Adapted a bit from a Rachel Ray show, 2016



1 large eggplant, very firm, cut into planks then pieces 2-inches long by 1/2-inch wide (see NOTE in directions)

1 tablespoon salt, to sprinkle on the eggplant

8 plum tomatoes, or vine tomatoes [I prefer double this amount]

4 tablespoons olive oil

1/2 cup Extra Virgin Olive Oil, divided

1/2 cup panko, or homemade breadcrumbs

3/4 cup almonds, peeled

4 cloves garlic, chopped

2 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves, chopped

1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

1 cup basil leaves, torn into small pieces

3/4 pound strozzapretti, or other short-cut pasta [I used penne rigate]

1/4 cup Pecorino cheese, freshly grated

1/2 cup starchy pasta water, saved from the pasta pot

Per Serving (excluding unknown items): 921 Calories; 57g Fat (54.1% calories from fat); 20g Protein; 88g Carbohydrate; 10g Dietary Fiber; trace Cholesterol; 1646mg Sodium. Exchanges: 5 Grain(Starch); 1/2 Lean Meat; 2 1/2 Vegetable; 10 1/2 Fat.

Carolyn T's Blog: tastingspoons.com

Servings: 4

NOTE: I prefer more eggplant - the original recipe called for a medium one, but the eggplant shrinks a lot - so use more is my advice. Don't eliminate the bread crumbs - they give a lovely crunch to nearly every bite.

1. Salt eggplant and let drain on a kitchen towel for 20 minutes; press off excess liquid.
2. Bring a pot of water to a boil. Score the tomatoes on the bottom with an X and blanch them for 30 seconds; cold shock and peel. Seed the tomatoes and finely chop. (You may also use canned tomatoes, drained and hand crushed if you prefer.). [If using smaller tomatoes, cut them in half, then scoop out the seeds, then chop - this method doesn't require the blanching.] Reserve pot of blanching water to cook the pasta.
3. Heat 2 tablespoons oil, 2 turns of the pan, in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Cook eggplant until golden brown, turning them at least once, about 10 minutes, remove and reserve. Add another tablespoon of oil to pan and toast breadcrumbs to golden; remove and reserve.
4. Add nuts to the skillet to toast; remove and set aside.
5. Add final tablespoon olive oil and garlic, and stir 30 seconds. Add chopped tomatoes and season with thyme, salt and pepper. Stir 2 minutes.
6. Add almonds to the tomato/garlic mixture. Stir in chili flakes, basil and EVOO, about 1/4 cup.
7. Turn the heat back on under the pot of blanching water. Salt water and cook pasta to al dente, reserve the starchy cooking water and add it to pesto. Drain pasta and toss with pesto.
8. Arrange the eggplant in shallow bowls and top with pasta. Combine cheese and breadcrumbs and sprinkle over pasta to serve.