

Spicy Penne with Corn and Sausage

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

The inspiration for this dish comes from a recipe from Giada de Laurentiis (original recipe can be found on the Food Network website), with a few changes. I am always looking for ways to add more mascarpone cheese to my diet, and it makes a fantastic, creamy pasta sauce. This is spicy from the Calabrian chile paste, which I'll tell ya was NOT easy to find! I looked in every grocery store I came near and couldn't even find it at Eataly (come on, Eataly...I'm disappointed in you). I ended up ordering it online from Italian Harvest; I would highly suggest seeking it out and ordering a spare jar to keep around when you want to whip up this easy dish. I imagine that it would be delicious in a variety of applications...let me know what you come up with!

1 pound penne rigate
2 to 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
3/4 pound Italian sausage (spicy or sweet), removed from casings if in links
1 large shallot, finely minced
1 large garlic clove, finely minced
2 cups frozen corn, thawed
1/3 cup dry white wine
8 ounces mascarpone cheese, at room temperature
1 to 2 tablespoons Calabrian chile paste, to taste
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for serving
1/4 cup fresh basil, chopped (about 0.75 ounces)

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Cook the pasta according to package directions. Drain, reserving 2/3 cup of the pasta water for the sauce.

In a large skillet over medium-high heat, add 1 to 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Cook the sausage for 9 to 12 minutes, until cooked through and slightly golden. Use the back of a wooden spoon to break up the sausage while it cooks. Remove the sausage from the skillet and set aside. Add 1 tablespoon of olive oil, the shallot and a sprinkling of salt; sauté for 2 to 3 minutes, until softened and translucent. Add the minced garlic and cook for 1 minute more. Add the corn kernels and cook until warm, about 3 minutes. Raise the heat to high and deglaze the pan with the white wine, stirring to scrape up the brown bits in the bottom of the pan. Cook for 3 minutes more to allow the wine to reduce.

In the bowl of a food processor, combine the mascarpone cheese and approximately 3/4 cup of the corn mixture. Process until mostly smooth, about 1 minute. It will still be slightly chunky and that's okay. With the heat cut off, return the mixture to the pan with the remaining corn mixture and add back the sausage and the Calabrian chile paste. Stir to combine. Season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper. When the pasta is al dente, add to the skillet, pour the Parmesan cheese on top of the pasta so it begins to stick to the pasta and mix to combine. Add enough pasta water to thin the sauce to your desired consistency. Reserve the remaining pasta water to use to reheat any leftover pasta; just add a little pasta water to thin the sauce out again before placing in the microwave. Add the fresh basil and toss again. Transfer to a serving bowl and serve with additional freshly grated Parmesan cheese.

Inspiration: Penne with Corn and Spicy Sausage, Giada de Laurentiis on foodnetwork.com