

Carbonara

A Traditional Cream Sauce with Pasta

There are about a thousand versions of this basic recipe but they all have one thing in common – you must stay close to the stove to prevent burning and this is one sauce that cannot be made ahead. It does not keep well either in the fridge or the freezer. Most of the recipes call for bacon but I have modernized it and replaced the bacon with ham – more for convenience than for any other reason. Also, using ham makes the timing less delicate and so makes the carbonara sauce easier for beginners

Ingredients

- 6 egg yolks
- 2 cups whipping cream or “Half & Half”
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese (preferably fresh)
- 1/4 tsp. salt (optional)
- 1/4 tsp. pepper (optional)
- 500 g ham sliced and cut into 1/2” squares*
- 1/2 cup onion, finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1/2 tsp. oregano (dried – if using fresh chopped oregano, double the amount used)
- olive oil
- 1 cup peas (fresh or frozen – not canned) – If frozen, defrost before you start making the sauce.
- 1 pound pasta (linguine or fettuccine)

*There are a wonderful variety of ham available. The first time you make this recipe, use one that you are familiar with (such as Virginia or Black Forest ham) but later on, you should get adventuresome and substitute some of the more robust deli hams (like Capocollo or Prosciutto) as each will add its own flavor to the sauce.

Mix the first 5 ingredients in a large metal bowl and set aside. Start the water for the pasta as per package directions. If you are using dried pasta, the timing is flexible in that you have 10 to 12 minutes to get everything ready. You can add the pasta to the water as soon as the water begins to boil. (Don't forget to

set your timer because overcooked pasta becomes mushy very quickly). If you decide to use fresh pasta, it will only take 3 or 4 minutes so delay adding the pasta to the water until all of the egg/cream mixture has been added to the onions and ham.

In a large pot (make sure it is large as everything will end up in it in the end), sauté the onions and garlic in a little olive oil over medium heat until the onions become translucent but not browned. Add the ham and peas.

Once the ham is warmed, add the oregano. Start adding the cream and egg mixture a bit at a time. If you add it all at once, it will cool too quickly and it will take longer to cook. Heat the mixture until bubbles begin to form around the edges. You are now ready to add the cooked pasta. Drain the pasta and add it a bit at a time to the sauce, tossing to make sure it is all well coated. Serve immediately.

Meal #1: Linguine or Fettuccine Carbonara

The preparation above is the preparation for this meal. You can serve the pasta carbonara with a Caesar salad and crusty bread or dinner rolls. Put some freshly grated parmesan or romano cheese on the table so that you and your guests can add a bit if they want.

Meal #2: Chicken Carbonara with Asparagus

For this meal, you will need to have a set of metal skewers. You can use bamboo ones but they tend to burn on the ends and so you'll need to wrap the exposed bamboo in aluminum foil before grilling.

Ingredients You'll Need for the Meal

Basic Carbonara Sauce (cannot be made ahead)

Ingredients for Main Dish

Chicken Breasts (1 per person)

2 cloves garlic – finely chopped

Olive Oil

Ingredients for Side Dish

1 pound fresh young asparagus - washed

12 pearl onions – peeled and cut into wedges

Olive Oil

Step 1: In a heavy skillet, heat the olive oil and garlic for the main dish over medium high heat. Once it starts to sputter, add the chicken breasts and cover. Turn the heat down and let the chicken brown. Set the timer for 25 minutes.

Step 2: After 10 minutes, start preparing the carbonara sauce as per the directions above. Turn the chicken breasts over and add some water if they are becoming dry.

Step 3: With 10 minutes left on the timer, in a medium sized frying pan, add a little olive oil, the pearl onions and the asparagus. Heat for one minute on high and then turn down to medium low. Let the asparagus simmer, stirring occasionally.

Step 4: If it all works out, the sauce should be ready as soon as the timer buzzer goes off. If it is not quite ready, turn the chicken and asparagus down a bit and cover both until the sauce is ready.

Step 5: Serve. On each plate, place one chicken breast and cover it with a generous amount of the carbonara sauce. Place several

asparagus spears on one side of the plate and serve. Don't forget to put some freshly grated Parmesan or Romano on the table.

Meal #3: Tortellini Carbonara with Italian Salad

Eating Italian doesn't always mean having pasta. Many Italian foods are hearty meat and potatoes kind of meals. This one is incredibly tasty.

Ingredients You'll Need for the Meal

Basic Carbonara Sauce (see recipe above)

Fresh Tortellini (there is a wide variety available in grocery stores)

¼ cup Olive Oil

Ingredients for Italian Chopped Salad

1 head Romaine lettuce, finely chopped

1/3 head cabbage, finely chopped

1 green bell pepper, chopped

1 red or yellow pepper, chopped

1/2 lb. dry salami, cut up

1 can drained garbanzo beans (rinsed)

1 can drained black olives

1/3 lb. Mozzarella, cut into julien strips

4 stalks celery, thinly sliced

3 lg. pieces cooked chicken (or turkey) – chopped. This is a great salad for using up left-overs. If you don't have any cooked chicken handy, don't worry about it.

Ingredients for Italian Salad Dressing

1/2 cup olive oil

2 tbsp. red wine vinegar

Dash balsamic vinegar or 2 cloves garlic, minced

2 tsp. lemon juice

1 tbsp. Dijon mustard

1 tsp. sugar

2 tbsp. Italian Seasoning

Step 1: Mix all of the ingredients for the salad dressing in a metal bowl. Set aside.

Step 2: Mix all of the ingredients for the salad itself and set aside in a wooden (or ceramic) bowl.

Step 3: Start the water on the stove for the tortellini as per package directions. At the same time start making the carbonara sauce (For this recipe, you can omit the peas and ham).

Step 4: When the tortellini are cooked (according to package directions), drain and toss with the olive oil. Set aside until the carbonara sauce is ready. At that point, add the sauce to the tortellini and toss lightly so as not to damage the pasta until it is well coated with sauce.

Step 5: Add the dressing to the salad and toss.

Step 6: Serve. On each plate put a generous helping of tortellini carbonara and one of the Italian salad.

Antipasti

One often sees jars of “antipasto” at grocery stores and wonders what they are. The answer is simple: “Antipasti” are appetizers, nothing more and nothing less. They can be served hot or, more commonly, cold. Indeed, cold antipasti can be divided into 7 main groups:

Sott’aceto: vegetables pickled in vinegar (pickled onions, gherkins, artichoke hearts)

Sott’olio: vegetables preserved in oil

Sotto sale: salted starters (salted olives, dried and salted tomatoes)

A base di carne: ham, sausage or other meat products

A base di pesce: based on fish (cold seafood salad)

A base di formaggio: Cheese (rare since cheese is most often served at the end of a meal)

A base de pane: all the starters based on bread

Apple Frittelle

A sweet dessert you can make a few hours ahead or serve them hot off the stove. I recommend you try them on a cold and snowy day. They really warm you up! This one is popular all over Italy especially during Carnival season (the middle of January). They are traditionally deep-fried but I have modified the recipe to use a lot less oil.

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs. apples (about 6 medium-sized apples)
- 4 large eggs
- 2 cups + 2 1/2 Tbsp. flour
- 4 Tbsp. sugar
- 2 Tsp. Rum extract or Almond Extract
- 4 Tbsp. Milk
- Grated zest from two lemons
- Powdered (icing) sugar to sprinkle
- Oil to fry

Step 1: Peel the apples, shred them and set them aside.

Step 2: In another bowl, beat the eggs, add the sugar and the flour. Mix until well combined then add the extract, the milk and the grated lemon zest.

Step 3: Add the apples and mix until well incorporated. Preheat a small electric frying pan to 350°F (You may want to adjust this up or down depending on your own frying pan) with enough oil to just cover the bottom. Do not burn the oil. If the frying pan is nonstick, you can use less oil.

Step 4: When the oil is hot, start adding the frittelle. Shape them in a flattened ball using two spoons and then drop them gently into the oil. They'll start to swell and to become golden. Fry both sides evenly.

Step 5: Cover a plate with paper towel and when the frittelle are ready (golden brown), place them on the paper towel to remove the excess oil. Sprinkle them with powder sugar. (If you are making them a bit ahead, do not dust with powdered sugar until just before serving.