



Pasta Pointers

For meal-appeal, buy a variety of pasta shapes. For thick sauces, use thicker pastas such as fettuccine and lasagna. Chunky sauces are best with sturdy pasta shapes such as fusilli (twists), farfalle (bow ties), macaroni or ziti. Vermicelli and spaghetti are thinner strands of pasta and work best with smooth, thin sauces.

Look for whole-grain pasta such as spaghetti, lasagna, macaroni and fettuccine. Like traditional pasta, whole-wheat pasta is high in complex carbohydrates, and the fiber content is almost three times higher. Half a cup of whole-wheat pasta has about 3 grams of fiber compared with about 1 gram of fiber in traditional pasta.

Whatever kind of pasta you choose, the way it is cooked is important. Pasta needs to cook in boiling water, so don't turn down the heat after adding the pasta unless the pot looks like it will boil over. The best way to prevent this is to use a size larger pot than you would normally use. Adding pasta to boiling water brings down water temperature, so starting off with more water means it will take less time to bring it back to the boiling point.

Pasta releases starch as it cooks. With too little water in the pan, the pasta ends up cooking in starch and becomes sticky and gummy. Use four quarts of water for every pound of pasta and cook according to package directions. When done, rinse the pasta in cold water to stop the cooking process.



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How much pasta should I cook? Two cups, or 8 ounces, of uncooked macaroni, shells, bow ties or other small to medium shapes equals about 4 cups cooked. A 1 1/4-inch diameter bunch of spaghetti, or 8 ounces, equals 4 cups of cooked spaghetti.

Italians like to cook pasta until it is "al dente," which translates as "to the tooth." This means it should be tender but still slightly firm, never mushy or soft.

Pasta is the general term given to all types of spaghetti, macaroni and noodles. Are you ready for variety? There are more than 600 different shapes of pasta. Serve your favorite shape today!

For recipes: Contact your county extension office in Kansas or visit the website at www.kidsacookin.ksu.edu

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