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The Essential Pasta Book

SOUTH AFRICAN FAVOURITES · AUTHENTIC ITALIAN CLASSICS



SAMPLE EDITION · 2026



Cook pasta with confidence.

A practical South African guide to the recipes we cook most, and the Italian traditions worth learning properly.

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WELCOME

Two pasta worlds. One useful book.

South African pasta cooking is practical, generous and gloriously adaptable. Italian pasta tradition is precise, regional and built on technique. This book respects both: local dishes are labelled proudly, traditional dishes stay recognisable, and substitutions are always explained honestly.



01

A better bowl of pasta.

Four recipes. Four different techniques. The same principles: season in layers, respect the shape and finish the pasta where the sauce lives.



Spaghetti Carbonara



PREP 10 MIN · COOK 20 MIN · SERVES 4

Ingredients

- 400 g spaghetti
- 160 g guanciale
- 4 egg yolks + 1 whole egg
- 100 g Pecorino Romano
- Black pepper · light salt

Method

- 01** Render guanciale slowly until crisp; switch off the heat.
- 02** Whisk eggs, Pecorino and pepper into a thick paste.
- 03** Cook spaghetti just shy of al dente; reserve pasta water.
- 04** Toss off heat, adding warm water gradually until glossy.

Creamy Chicken & Mushroom



PREP 12 MIN · COOK 23 MIN · SERVES 4

Ingredients

- 350 g penne
- 500 g chicken thighs
- 250 g brown mushrooms
- 250 ml fresh cream
- Dijon · Parmesan · lemon

Method

- 01** Sear seasoned chicken until golden; set aside.
- 02** Brown mushrooms in a single layer until deeply coloured.
- 03** Simmer garlic, cream and mustard gently for 3 minutes.
- 04** Toss with penne, chicken, pasta water, cheese and lemon.

Cheesy Mince Pasta Bake

PREP 15 MIN · COOK 45 MIN · SERVES 6

Ingredients

- 500 g rigatoni
- 500 g lean beef mince
- Onion · garlic · tomato paste
- 800 g chopped tomatoes
- 250 g mature Cheddar

Method

- 01** Brown mince in two batches so it does not steam.
- 02** Reduce the tomato sauce for 15 minutes.
- 03** Boil rigatoni 3 minutes less than the packet time.
- 04** Top with Cheddar; bake at 200°C until bronzed.

Cacio e Pepe

PREP 5 MIN · COOK 15 MIN · SERVES 4

Ingredients

- 400 g tonnarelli or thick spaghetti
- 140 g Pecorino Romano
- 2 tsp crushed black pepper
- Fine salt · starchy pasta water

Method

- 01** Toast pepper in a dry wide pan for 60 seconds.
- 02** Cook pasta in moderately salted water; reserve 400 ml.
- 03** Whisk slightly cooled water into Pecorino until smooth.
- 04** Finish pasta with pepper, then emulsify with cheese off heat.

Guanciale, pancetta or bacon?

TRADITIONAL CHOICE

GUANCIALE

Cured pork jowl

Rich, sweet fat; defining in carbonara, gricia and amatriciana.

PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVE

PANCETTA

Cured pork belly

Cleaner and leaner. The closest widely available substitute.

LAST-RESORT SUBSTITUTE

BACON

Usually smoked belly

Smoky, familiar and accessible, but it changes the dish.

Our rule: state the tradition, then explain the substitute.

Ragu alla Bolognese



The shape of the sauce

This is a meat sauce supported by soffritto, wine, milk and restrained tomato. Brown the meat before liquid enters, then let time soften the texture without boiling the fat away.

The pairing

Fresh tagliatelle gives the dense ragu a broad, porous surface. Spaghetti Bolognese is a valid international tradition, but it is not Bologna's traditional format.

REFERENCE METHOD

Soffritto - brown beef and pork - reduce wine - add restrained tomato - simmer gently for at least two hours - add milk during the cook - rest and adjust.

Homemade chilli sauce

Fresh chilli brings both heat and flavour. Garlic, acidity, sweetness and salt need to support it rather than compete.

CONTROL THE HEAT

Start with fewer bird's-eye chillies and keep some seeds out. Blend, taste after simmering, then adjust. Heat can be added; it is much harder to remove.

STORE IT SAFELY

This is a refrigerated fresh sauce, not a shelf-stable preserve. Cool promptly, cover and refrigerate. Do not improvise room-temperature bottling.

Pasta, eggs, braai plates

A useful sauce beyond the pasta bowl



How to cook pasta properly

01 READY THE SAUCE

The sauce should be ready before the pasta reaches the water.

02 BOIL AND SEASON

Use enough water for movement and start around 7-10 g salt per litre.

03 STIR EARLY

Stir immediately and through the first 90 seconds. Oil is not the fix.

04 TASTE EARLY

The packet time is a tasting prompt. A chalky centre is undercooked.

05 RESERVE WATER

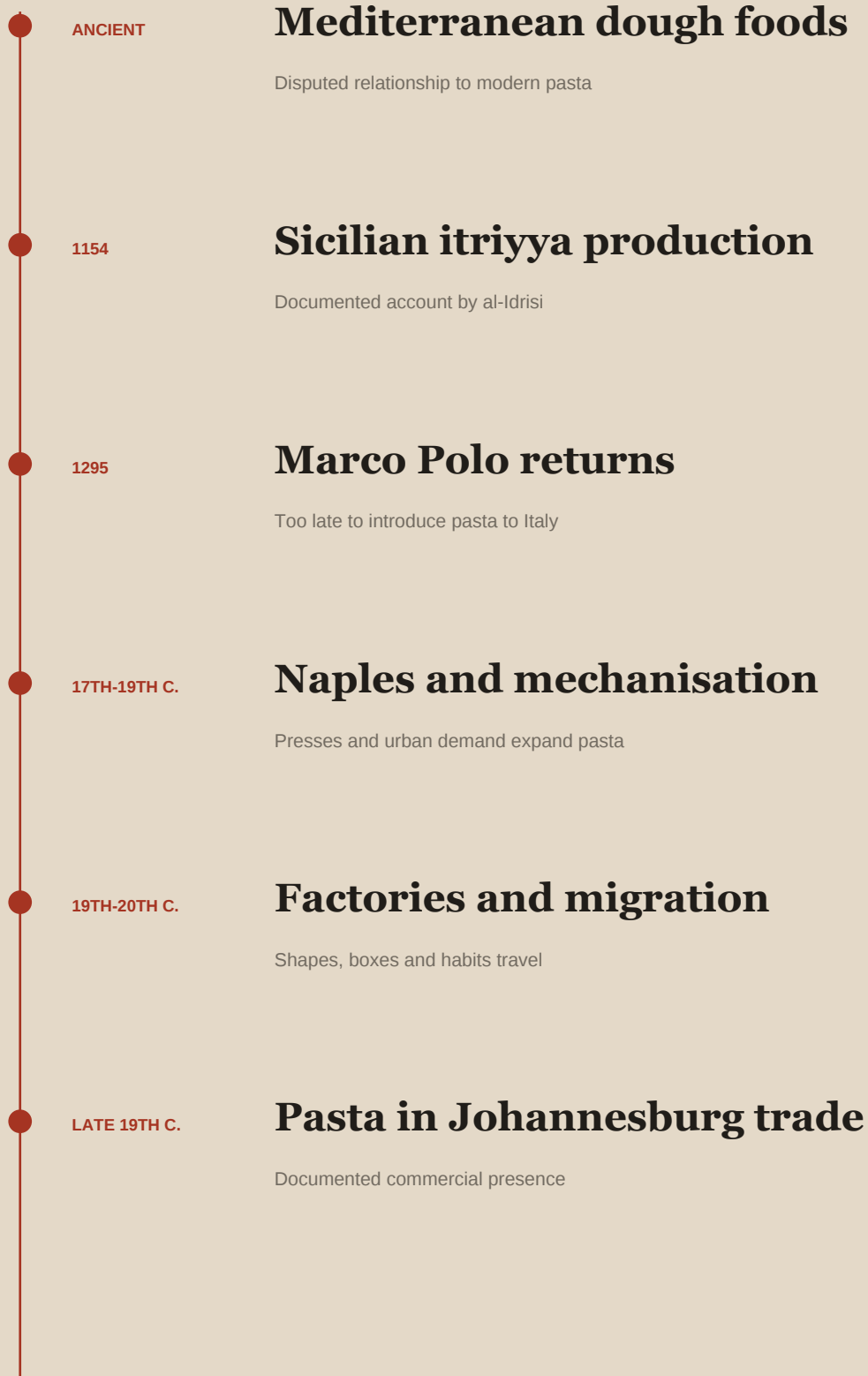
Keep at least a mug before draining; add it gradually in the sauce pan.

06 FINISH TOGETHER

Toss pasta and sauce over controlled heat until glossy and cohesive.

Fresh, filled, baked and gluten-free pasta each need a different finish. The full guide keeps those exceptions visible.

Pasta history: a careful timeline



DOCUMENTED - CONSENSUS - THEORY - DISPUTED - FOLKLORE

Match sauce texture to pasta shape

SMOOTH TOMATO

Spaghetti - penne

Coats narrow strands; enters small tubes

MEAT RAGU

Tagliatelle - rigatoni

Broad surface and ridges carry dense meat

PESTO

Trofie - linguine

Twists grip paste; flat strands carry emulsion

CREAMY

Fettuccine - farfalle

Broad faces and folds hold a smooth coating

CHUNKY VEGETABLE

Conchiglie - fusilli

Cups and spirals catch small pieces

BUTTER OR OIL

Spaghetti - ravioli

Thin films suit strands; butter glosses filling

Pairing is practical geometry, not a rigid culinary law.

Pecorino Romano



Why it tastes different

A firm, salty sheep's-milk cheese with a direct, savoury edge. It brings more assertiveness than Parmigiano Reggiano and is central to carbonara, cacio e pepe, gricia and amatriciana.

Buying in South Africa

Look for Pecorino Romano on the rind or label, then compare the price by weight. A small wedge keeps better than pre-grated cheese and lets you grate finely enough for smooth emulsions.

SUBSTITUTION EFFECT

Parmigiano Reggiano is less salty, nuttier and sweeter. It can make a delicious sauce, but the result will not have Pecorino's characteristic sharpness.

SEASONAL COLLECTION

Summer pasta in South Africa

Hot days call for pasta that travels well, serves a table and tastes bright rather than heavy.

COOL

Sweetcorn and feta pasta salad

QUICK

Peri-peri prawn linguine

FAMILY

Chicken pasta salad

MEAT-FREE

Lemon and pea pasta

Built for braais, lunch tables and no-oven evenings.



Explore the pasta encyclopedia

Start with a dish, ingredient or problem. Each path leads to the recipe, sauce, shape, region and technique that explain it.

RECIPES

Cook a complete dish

Carbonara - lasagne - pasta salads

SAUCES

Understand the structure

Emulsions - ragu - tomato - pesto

INGREDIENTS

Buy and substitute well

Guanciale - passata - Pecorino

SHAPES

Match texture and geometry

Spaghetti - rigatoni - filled pasta

SCHOOL

Fix the technique

Al dente - reheating - crowd cooking

HISTORY

Separate evidence from myth

Origins - regions - South African record

One connected route from tonight's dinner to lasting knowledge.

Cook tonight. Learn for a lifetime.

PastaRecipes.co.za is being built as South Africa's dedicated pasta platform: practical family dinners, honest South African adaptations, properly researched Italian classics, shape guides, technique lessons and tools that genuinely work.

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This sample is a design and content preview. The paid edition is not yet on sale.