

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Pasta

Theo Randall

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ABOUT THE BOOK

In his first book, top chef Theo Randall offers a fabulous collection of over 100 original pasta recipes. Using both fresh and dried pasta and tasty ingredients, Theo presents a wide variety of simple, delicious dishes, many achievable in minutes.

From taglierini with peas, prosciutto and Parmesan, to linguine with pesto, potato and green beans, to ravioli with sweet potato, fennel and chilli, there is a dish to please everyone. With easy-to-follow recipes, beautiful photography, and tips from the expert, Theo's *Pasta* collection is destined to become a kitchen classic.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Theo Randall, who served his apprenticeship with Max Magarian in London and Alice Waters in San Francisco, was head chef at the Michelin-starred River Café for ten years. He now runs his own restaurant, Theo Randall at the InterContinental Park Lane, in London. Theo lives in London with his wife Natalie and two children, Max and Lola.

THEO RANDALL



PASTA



EBURY
PRESS



To Natalie, Max and Lola



INTRODUCTION

One of the reasons I wanted to write this book was to show how easy it is to make a really good plate of pasta. If you follow the instructions in the recipes and trust your instincts, you will always produce something delicious. Cooking is all about confidence, and the more pasta dishes you prepare the more confident you will become.

Less is definitely more when it comes to cooking pasta. Making sure it is perfectly cooked is more important than how many flavours you have with it. There is nothing better than a simple plate of spaghetti with olive oil, garlic, salt and pepper.

My mother taught me to cook pasta when I was just six years old, and I have adored spaghetti in particular from a very early age. I'll never forget the first time I ate spaghetti alla vongole in Venice. I was only eight but it was a life-changing experience. The combination of the pasta, clams, garlic and parsley was so delicious, and I loved the fact that it was acceptable to use your fingers to take the clams out of their shells. I love cooking pasta for my own children, and on rainy days have been known to set up ravioli-making competitions, which tend to be very messy but great fun. There's a real sense of achievement when you make something to eat from scratch – particularly if you serve it to friends. It also makes for great conversation at dinner.

My first job was for the chef Max Magarian, who owned a French restaurant called Chez Max in

Surbiton. He taught me the discipline of preparation and cooking and the importance of simplicity. This was in the middle of the nouvelle cuisine era but Max wasn't having anything to do with it; he believed classic food was the only way. After spending almost four years with Max, I went to work in a little restaurant that had just opened for dinner on the Thames called The River Café, and met two women who went on to change the way we think of Italian food in this country. Working there was an amazing experience, as it had a very different feel from most restaurants in London at the time and also had a great philosophy, not just about food but about life itself.

You can't really understand pasta until you have eaten it in Italy. No matter where you are, the Italians have an understanding of pasta, and it's very rare to be served a bad plateful. I have spent a lot of time in Italy over the years trying great pasta in little trattorias and even some fancy restaurants. I have been so inspired to re-create my experiences there that I buy eggs and flour for the restaurant direct from Italy, just so we can make pasta with the same amazing deep yellow colour that you get in regions such as Piedmont. We aim to reach a comparable level of quality to that in Italy, to the point where we spend eight hours a day making pasta. We always ensure that it is made the day before serving, so it dries out slightly and has the perfect *al dente* bite.

I'm not alone in my enthusiasm for pasta. It has become a staple food in the UK, and there is a remarkable variety available in the shops. Pasta can

be simple or more technical, and it is a great medium for using seasonal ingredients. It can be made by the most experienced cook or by a complete novice. I believe pasta is the first thing that everyone should be taught to cook properly, as once you understand the principles you will enjoy it that much more. The Italians, of course, take pasta very seriously, and quite rightly so. There are different shapes and sauces in every corner of the country, reflecting the region and the produce available. A lot of pasta recipes have peasant origins but in Italy there is no class system where food is concerned – everyone, whether rich or poor, appreciates good pasta.

When you sit down in even the simplest restaurant in Italy, you are always given *antipasti* followed by *primi* and *secondi*. I consider the *primi* course, which consists of pasta or risotto, to be the most important, as it usually gives a good indication of the quality of the restaurant. The portion is always what we would call a starter. This is because, as a rule, pasta shouldn't be served in large quantities. When you eat it, the first mouthful should taste as delicious as the last, but if you have too much on your plate it will congeal as it cools and acquire a slightly unpleasant characteristic. I'm not a fan of main-course pastas but I suspect the reason we eat them in this country is that we don't have a tradition of three courses. Next time you have friends over for dinner, put together some *antipasti* – for example, mozzarella, prosciutto, artichokes, roasted peppers, etc. – then serve a small portion of pasta followed by

a simple main course, such as grilled beef or maybe a whole roast fish to share. You will appreciate that you have eaten a very well-balanced meal – vegetables to start, followed by carbohydrate and then protein.

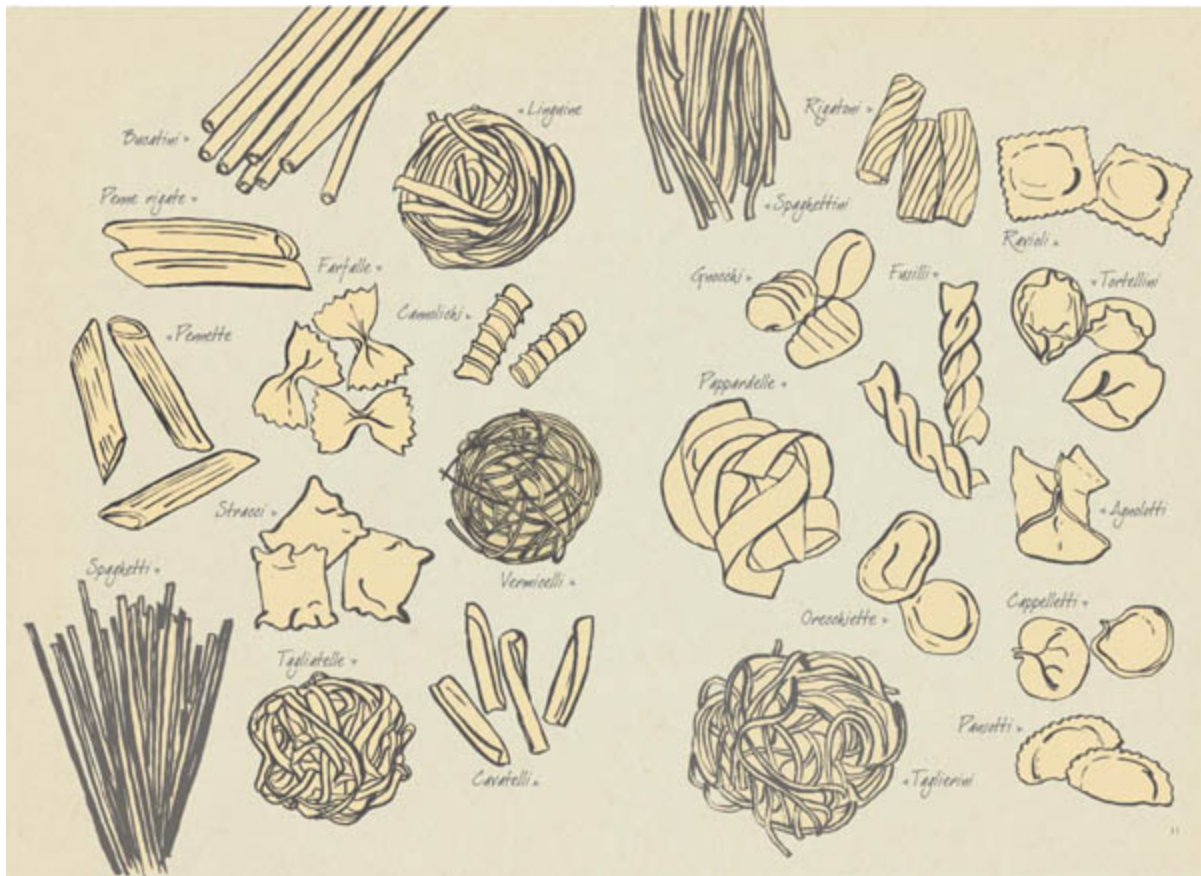
The quantities in this book are for four main-course portions or six starter, or *primi*, portions. I have given smaller quantities for egg pasta than for durum wheat pasta, as dried egg pasta tends to increase more in volume when cooked.

Most of the ingredients in the recipes shouldn't be too difficult to find. If you do have problems tracking down specialist items, try Natoora (www.natoora.co.uk), a supplier I use in the restaurant and at home. They purchase most of their vegetables directly from Italy (including Datterini and Ox Heart tomatoes) and are a good source of cheeses such as burrata, buffalo mozzarella and pecorino.

Finally, the dried pasta I've used in this book is De Cecco and the canned tomatoes Cirio, both of which are available from many major supermarkets and delis and are stocked by Natoora.

Recipe notes: All recipes serve 4 people as a main course or 6 people as a starter unless specified otherwise.

When cooking dried pasta, please refer to the cooking time on the packet ([see here](#)).



Pasta Dough

Proving and Rolling Out the Dough

Cutting the Dough

Making Ravioli

Making Agnolotti

Potato Gnocchi

FRESH PASTA

Fresh pasta is a lot easier to make than most people imagine. The dough doesn't have to be kneaded for ages; you can just whiz the ingredients together in a food processor and it is ready in seconds. Rolling out and cutting the dough is fun and very satisfying to do.

Fresh pasta dough is particularly useful for making stuffed pastas such as ravioli, tortellini and agnolotti. It is very pliable, so you can use it for all manner of shapes and sizes. Stuffed pastas tend to be served on the day on which they are made (though you can store them in the fridge for a couple of days if necessary), but ribbon pastas such as taglierini, tagliatelle and pappardelle are best made a day in advance so they dry out slightly. This results in a much firmer texture when cooked, which enables them to absorb the sauce better. If you cook them straight away, they can be quite slimy.

The key to success when making pasta dough is to use good-quality eggs and the correct proportion of egg to flour. I find the best eggs are Italian ones. They have much richer yolks than most of the eggs you can buy in the UK, since the chickens are fed a diet of corn and carrots, which enhances the colour and texture of the yolk. However, any good organic eggs would be fine. If you keep your own hens, try hanging up a bunch of carrots for them to peck.

The flour should be Italian tipo 00 flour – a very fine flour that is now available in many large

supermarkets. Apart from this, all you need is a little fine semolina flour and your eggs. Don't add salt or olive oil to the dough; they will do nothing except discolour it.

You will need to invest in a pasta machine for rolling out the dough. They can be bought in any good kitchen shop. The best ones, of course, are Italian, and my favourite brand is Imperia. The small ones are ideal for home cooks. If you are a bit more ambitious, Imperia also makes a restaurant machine, which is probably the best pasta machine you can buy. The manual machines (as opposed to the electric ones) tend to be the safest and the nicest to use, because you can work at your own pace rather than the speed of the rollers.

A pasta machine not only rolls out the pasta dough and cuts it if necessary, it also 'proves' the dough, which is vital to ensure a good texture. It's a simple process of feeding the dough through the rollers at their widest setting at least five times, folding it in three between each rolling. This works the gluten in the flour and gives the dough elasticity, enabling you to roll it out quite finely.

Finally, don't feel you have to make your own pasta in order to cook the recipes in this book. There are some good brands of dried egg pasta available, including Pasta del Aldo and Cipriani.

Pasta Dough

300g tipo 00 flour

100g fine semolina, plus extra for dusting

2 large organic eggs

6 large organic egg yolks

Place all the ingredients in a food processor and pulse until they form a yellow ball of dough. At this point, the dough should have a smooth, firm but slightly sticky texture, almost like plasticine. If it seems wet, add an extra teaspoon or two of flour. Divide the dough into 2 equal balls and immediately wrap them in cling film to prevent them drying out. The dough will keep in the fridge for up to 10 days. You can freeze it but I wouldn't recommend it, since it can discolour and lose a lot of moisture on thawing.

Proving and rolling out the dough

With the rollers of your pasta machine on their widest setting, pass a piece of dough through, then fold it into 3. Give it a quarter turn and pass it through the machine again. Repeat this 5 or 6 times so the gluten in the pasta is thoroughly worked, then pass it through the machine to roll it out, progressively narrowing the rollers by one notch each time. Make it as thin as you feel comfortable with. The more the pasta has been worked initially, the thinner you will be able to roll it. Make sure the pasta sheet is no more than 60cm long, otherwise it will be difficult to handle and may break.





Cutting the dough

Once you have a long piece of very thin pasta, use the cutters on your machine to cut it into taglierini, tagliatelle or pappardelle. Place the cut pasta on a long tray in a single layer, sprinkling it lightly with semolina flour so it doesn't stick. Cover with greaseproof paper and leave in the fridge overnight. This will help dry out the pasta and give a better texture once it is cooked. Alternatively you could put it on a wire rack and leave to dry at room temperature for 12 hours. The pasta should be firm but not too brittle; if it's brittle it will break when you pick it up, and that's the last thing you want.



STUFFED PASTA

Making ravioli

Roll out the pasta dough as thinly as possible, in a sheet about 12cm wide and 60cm long.

Place heaped teaspoonfuls of the filling along the length of the pasta, leaving a 3cm gap between each one and making sure there is enough pasta free to fold over the filling.

Brush a little water between each pile of filling, then fold the pasta over and, using your 2 little fingers, push down round each ravioli to seal. Try to ensure that there is no trapped air inside.

With a ridged ravioli cutter or a sharp knife, cut between each ravioli and trim off any overlapping pasta. The ravioli can be cooked straight away or kept in the fridge on a floured tray for up to 2 days.



Making agnolotti

Roll out the pasta dough as thinly as possible, in a sheet 60cm long and 12cm wide.

Cut it lengthwise in half, then cut it across at 6cm intervals so you end up with 6cm squares of pasta.

Put a heaped teaspoon of filling in the middle of each square, then brush the edges with a little water.

Bring 2 opposite corners up to meet in the middle, then bring up the remaining 2 corners, forming a diamond shape. Make sure all the sides are sealed and there is no excess air inside. The agnolotti should look a bit like Chinese paper lanterns.

Put the agnolotti in the fridge on a floured tray until you are ready to cook them. You can prepare them up to 2 days in advance, as long as the filling is not too wet.

