

Tomato Pasta with Eggplant and Sausage (on the side)

Serves 4

Decidedly a tomato pasta with eggplant and not an eggplant pasta– so much so that the eggplant could easily be replaced with any vegetable– say, peppers, fennel or zucchini. The moral of the story is you can sauté any vegetable in sausage fat, add tomato sauce or puree and have a very good, saucy tomato pasta that’s more than the sum of its parts. With a little sausage on the side, it feels more like a “full dinner” and less like a “bowl of food”.

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more
- 1 pound sausage of your choosing
- 1 pound eggplant, fennel or zucchini, chopped
- 1 red or yellow onion, sliced (not too thin)
- Kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper
- 1 24-ounce jar tomato sauce, puree, or can of crushed tomatoes
- Fresh or dried oregano, optional
- Crushed red pepper flakes, optional
- 2 cloves garlic, very, very well crushed or finely chopped
- 1 pound dried pasta such as casarecce or rigatoni
- Basil, if you have it
- Pecorino or Parmesan cheese, for grating

Preparation

1. Heat olive oil in a large skillet or pot over medium heat. Add sausage and using a fork or tip of a knife, poke holes sporadically to allow the fat and steam to escape as it cooks. Cook the sausage, turning occasionally until well browned on all sides and cooked through, 10–12 minutes, depending on style and thickness of sausage.
2. Remove sausage from skillet and set aside, leaving all the fat behind (there should be a good bit). Add the eggplant and onion and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the eggplant is nicely browned and impossibly tender and the onions start to fry a little at the edges (the eggplant may start to stick a little as it cooks, that's okay...add more olive oil as needed), 10–15 minutes.
3. Add tomato (whatever type you're using) and season again with salt and pepper. Add two cups or so of water (I like to fill the jar or can with water and swirl it to get all the bits out) to the pot, along with any oregano or crushed red pepper flakes and bring to a simmer. Continue to cook, occasionally crushing the eggplant with the side of a spoon or flat-sided spatula, encouraging it to break down into the sauce. Add the raw garlic and continue to cook until the sauce has nicely thickened and the eggplant is totally softened, 10–12 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, cook pasta in a large pot of salted boiling water until just al dente. Using a slotted spoon, remove pasta and transfer to the pot with the sauce and continue to cook until the pasta is totally cooked through, another few minutes or so.
5. Divide pasta among bowls and finish with torn basil and grated cheese.
6. Serve alongside sausage and maybe a nice little salad.