

Penne with Grape Tomatoes, Spinach and Toasted Garlic

This dish showcases what I love most about Italian food: wholesome, fresh ingredients pulled together in a simple but flavorful way that the whole family enjoys. The key to this recipe is the way the garlic is cooked: It's thinly sliced and sautéed gently in olive oil until just golden, so it infuses the dish with a deep, toasted flavor and aroma. The rest is minimal prep for maximum reward, with bursting bite-sized tomatoes and just-wilted spinach. I know it will be as much of a regular on your dinner table as it is on mine.

Makes 4 servings

4 medium cloves garlic
4 cups grape tomatoes
3 tablespoons olive oil
3 cups lightly packed baby spinach (3 ounces)
1 ounce Parmesan cheese (1/3 cup grated)
3/4 pound whole-grain penne
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Put a large pot of water on the stove to boil. While the water heats, peel and thinly slice the garlic and halve the tomatoes.

Put the oil and garlic in a large skillet over medium heat. Cook, stirring frequently, until the garlic is golden brown, about 5 minutes. Be careful not to let the garlic burn.

Add the tomatoes to the skillet, turn the heat up to medium-high, cover, and cook, stirring once or twice, until the tomatoes are warm and softened but still retain their shape, about 4 minutes.

Coarsely chop the spinach and stir it into the tomatoes. Remove the skillet from the heat and cover to keep warm until the pasta is ready. Grate the cheese and set aside.

Meanwhile, once the water comes to a boil, add the pasta and cook according to the directions on the package, then drain.

Add the pasta to the skillet along with 1/4 cup of the cheese, the salt, and pepper and toss to combine. Serve garnished with the remaining cheese.

SERVING SIZE 2 cups

CALORIES 480; Total Fat 15g (Sat Fat 2.5g, Mono Fat 8.0g, Poly Fat 1.2g); Protein 15g; Carb 73g; Fiber 10g; Cholesterol 5mg; Sodium 460mg

EXCELLENT SOURCE OF Fiber, Protein, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Vitamin K

GOOD SOURCE OF Calcium, Iron, Manganese, Potassium

CONCENTRATED CARBOHYDRATES (pasta, breads, grains, and so on) boost the brain chemical serotonin, which has a calming, relaxing effect. So opt for protein and vegetables midday when you want to stay sharp and save your carbs for dinnertime when you are ready to unwind. Also, research shows that eating most of your daily carbs at your evening meal might even benefit your metabolism.