



Pasta Guide

The Italian Guide to Pasta: Quality, Shape & Tradition

Why Pasta Quality Matters

Pasta is more than a base for sauce — it's the foundation of every great pasta dish. High-quality pasta affects:

- **Texture** — firm, satisfying and al dente
- **Flavour** — tastes of the wheat, not fillers
- **Sauce adhesion** — holds every bite of your sauce
- **Nutritional value** — retains protein and goodness

Cheap supermarket pasta may fill your plate, but it often sacrifices texture, flavour and overall enjoyment.

The Secret to Great Pasta

High-quality pasta is crafted with care. Look for:

- **Slow drying** — Low temperatures over 48–60 hours help preserve texture, protein and flavour.
- **Quality flour** — Durum wheat semolina or “00” flour, depending on the type of pasta, provides the right texture and bite.
- **Bronze-cut shaping** — Creates a rougher surface that grips sauce beautifully.
- **Natural ingredients** — Ingredients such as squid ink, spinach or tomato can enhance colour and add subtle flavour.

Tip: Even the best pasta needs proper cooking: plenty of salted water, cook until al dente and never overcook it!

Why Avoid Cheap Pasta?

Cheap pasta may save money, but it can come with compromises:

- **High-temperature industrial drying** — can result in pasta with a poorer texture when cooked.
- **Lower-quality flour** — can mean a weaker bite and less flavour.
- **Smoother surfaces** — can make it more difficult for sauce to cling to the pasta.
- **Overall eating quality** — quality ingredients and careful production can make a noticeable difference to texture and flavour.

Good-quality, slow-dried pasta delivers the satisfying taste and texture that can transform even the simplest pasta dish.

The Real Story Behind Italian Pasta Shapes

Why Italy Has So Many Shapes

Italian pasta isn't just decorative — each shape serves a purpose.

- **Orecchiette (“little ears”)** — Perfect for chunky sauces and vegetables such as sautéed greens.
- **Penne rigate** — Ridged tubes that work beautifully with hearty tomato or meat sauces.
- **Spaghetti** — Long, thin strands ideal for smoother sauces and olive oil-based dishes.

Pasta design is edible engineering: **the shape serves the sauce, not vice versa.**

Why Texture Matters

Texture affects how the sauce clings to the pasta and how the pasta feels in your mouth:

- **Ridged pasta (rigate)** — grips and captures sauce.

- **Smooth pasta (lisce)** – provides a more delicate mouthfeel.
- **Bronze-cut pasta** – has a rougher, more porous surface that helps sauce cling.
- **Teflon-cut pasta** – generally has a smoother surface.

Even the flour matters. Durum wheat semolina provides bite, structure and colour, while fresh egg pasta brings richness and a more delicate texture.

Egg Pasta vs Semolina Pasta: What's the Difference?

Not all Italian pasta is made the same. While most dried pasta is made with durum wheat semolina and water, many traditional fresh pasta varieties are made with eggs.

- **Semolina pasta** – Made from durum wheat semolina and water, it has a firmer texture and is ideal for robust sauces. It is particularly associated with Southern Italian pasta-making traditions and includes shapes such as spaghetti, penne, rigatoni and orecchiette.
- **Egg pasta** – Made with flour and eggs, it is richer, softer and more delicate. Particularly associated with the pasta traditions of Northern and Central Italy, it includes tagliatelle, pappardelle, fettuccine and lasagne sheets.

The choice is not about one being better than the other. It is about matching the pasta to the sauce.

- **Egg pasta** pairs beautifully with rich meat sauces such as ragù, game and slow-cooked dishes. The richness of the eggs complements the sauce, while broad pasta shapes capture it beautifully.
- **Semolina pasta** works wonderfully with tomato-based sauces, seafood, vegetables and olive oil-based recipes, allowing the flavours of the ingredients to shine.

This is why in Bologna you will traditionally find **Tagliatelle al Ragù** rather than Spaghetti Bolognese. The broad ribbons of egg pasta are perfectly suited to capturing the rich meat ragù.

A Shape for Every Occasion

Type of Sauce Best Pasta Shapes

Thick, chunky sauces Orecchiette, conchiglie, rigatoni, paccheri

Smooth, oil-based sauces Spaghetti, linguine, vermicelli

Creamy or cheesy sauces Fusilli, farfalle, garganelli

Baked dishes Ziti, penne, cannelloni

Matching the pasta shape to the sauce helps ensure that every bite is balanced and delicious.

Pasta Shapes and Their Regional Roots

Many pasta shapes have fascinating cultural and regional origins:

- **Trofie – Liguria** – Short, twisted pasta traditionally paired with pesto.
- **Malloreddus – Sardinia** – Small ridged pasta traditionally served with rich Sardinian sauces.
- **Strozzapreti** – Twisted pasta whose unusual name has inspired several humorous legends.
- **Paccheri – Campania** – Large tubes traditionally associated with Naples and Campania, surrounded by colourful stories about their name and history.

Pasta as Culture

Pasta is identity, tradition and history in Italy.

- Family recipes reflect regional roots.
- Pasta-making traditions and shapes have been passed down through generations.
- Each shape tells a story of geography, culture and culinary ingenuity.

Choosing pasta is about more than cooking — it is a way of connecting with Italian history, traditions and taste.

How to Choose Pasta Like an Italian

When buying pasta, keep these tips in mind:

1. **Start with the sauce** – Choose a shape that complements it.
2. **Check the texture** – Bronze-cut pasta has a rougher surface that helps sauce cling.
3. **Look at the flour** – Quality durum wheat semolina helps produce firm, al dente pasta.
4. **Consider tradition** – Regional shapes often developed alongside particular local recipes and ingredients.
5. **Invest in quality** – Carefully produced, slow-dried pasta can transform even a very simple meal.

With the right pasta, every meal becomes a taste of Italy — rich in flavour, texture and history.

Now that you know more about pasta, check our range of slow-dried [artisan pasta](#).

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