

Along with so many people at the end of holiday indulging, I'm tired of so much rich food and find myself aching for fresher, lighter foods. The dish is light and lemony, with big, juicy shrimp and bright, crunchy asparagus. Piled high on a bed of al dente pasta, it looks like it came from a restaurant kitchen, and it tastes like a breath of fresh air after all the decadence we've consumed in this house over the past six weeks.

If you don't care for asparagus, sub in another crisp green vegetable, maybe some sugar snap peas or fresh broccolini. Or skip the sauteed veggie and serve the scampi alongside a salad. After heavy, rich holiday foods, you deserve whatever fresh flavors suit your craving!

Serves: 2

Time to make it: About 35 minutes

INGREDIENTS

2/3 pound fresh or frozen shrimp, 16-20 count* (see notes)
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
5 cloves fresh garlic, chopped
1/2 medium sweet onion, halved and sliced in crescent moon shapes
1/2 pound fresh asparagus, trimmed and cut into 2-inch pieces
A few shakes crushed red pepper flakes, if you like it spicy
Juice of 1/2 lemon, plus the zest
2 or 3 portions spaghetti, linguine or angel hair pasta
A few shakes of [parm-romano blend](#) cheese, for serving

*NOTES

The "count" on shrimp refers to its size, and the average number of shrimp per pound. The higher the number, the smaller the shrimp. I have no problem with using frozen shrimp, especially because supermarkets often receive the shrimp frozen anyway. For many reasons, including food safety, fair trade and human rights, I always purchase shrimp harvested in the U.S., and my preference is white gulf shrimp. It's sweet and juicy, whereas some of the shrimp noted as "Key West" can be sharper and brinier. Whatever you purchase, be sure to thoroughly clean and de-vein it. More details on this below in the photo steps.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place a large, non-stick skillet over low heat. Add olive oil and garlic (plus the red pepper, if using) and leave it alone. When the oil heats very slowly, the garlic gets softer and more mellow, which leads to the flavor we all know in scampi. Rush this step and the garlic will burn, which is definitely not delicious. Expect this low, slow cooking to take about 20 minutes.
2. Thaw the shrimp (if frozen), and then peel and de-vein each one. If you have never done this before, it's easy but extremely important. Removing the shell is pretty simple. Next, use a sharp paring knife to make a shallow cut down the outside curved part of the shrimp, revealing a dark stringy thing. I hate to tell you, but this isn't *actually* a vein—it's a digestive tract (disgusting, but important to know). Slip the sharp tip of the knife underneath this nasty thing and pull it out. Lay the cleaned shrimp on layers of paper towel and set aside for now. If working ahead, cover and refrigerate.

3. Bring a large pot of water to boil for cooking the pasta. Season it generously with kosher salt and (once boiling) add the pasta, stirring to prevent sticking. Cook until al dente, according to directions on the pasta box. While this is underway, continue with the recipe below.
4. After the garlic has poached for about 20 minutes, turn the skillet heat up to medium. When oil begins to bubble more visibly around the garlic, add the onions and asparagus pieces and sauté 5 to 7 minutes, until the onions are translucent and the asparagus is slightly softened but still bright green.
5. Move the vegetables to the outer edges of the skillet and arrange the cleaned shrimp in the center. Cook only enough time for all the edges of the shrimp to become pink and opaque.
6. Turn the shrimp, season the whole skillet with salt and pepper, and sprinkle on the lemon zest. Squeeze the lemon half over the mixture and continue to cook until the second side of the shrimp is cooked. Move all the skillet ingredients to the outer edges.
7. Using tongs, move the cooked pasta directly to the center of the skillet and swirl it around to coat it with the flavors of the skillet.
8. Arrange the pasta on serving plates or bowls, hit it with a little [parm-romano blend](#), if you'd like, and top with veggies and shrimp.