

Handmade Lemon-Herb Pasta – Comfort du Jour

My first attempts at making handmade pasta 10 years ago were outright disastrous, mostly because I had assumed the method of fork-stirring eggs into a mountain-like peak of all-purpose flour was going to be easy. In my defense, the shows I had watched on Food Network made it *seem* easy, but in real life, it was a humongous freaking mess that left me cussing up a storm and vowing that I'd "never make that again." Truth is, it is those really frustrating failures that inspire me the most to give it another go, and I'm so glad I did!

The recipe I use today includes a special variety of wheat called durum, which is used to make semolina flour, the gold standard in authentic Italian pasta recipes. Semolina lends a warm, slightly nutty flavor, a light yellowish color and a firmer, more toothsome texture. It has been a total game changer in my journey to making handmade pasta. The recipe requires separation of the eggs, using only the yolks, plus an amount of water. Once I found this easy formula, the flavor possibilities became near-endless. And that's where the real fun of handmade pasta begins! Being creative with the colors, flavors and shapes of handmade pasta is one of the things that gives me—a home cook—a very satisfying sense of accomplishment.

Adapted from

[Semolina Pasta Dough Recipe | James Beard Foundation](#)

INGREDIENTS

8 oz. semolina flour (plus extra for rolling pasta dough)
4 oz. unbleached, all-purpose flour* (see notes)
2 oz. white whole wheat flour
1/2 tsp. kosher salt
1/2 cup filtered water, room temperature*
2 egg yolks, room temperature*
1 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil (mine is whole lemon-fused for bright lemon flavor)
Zest of one organic lemon* (only the bright yellow peel)
2 Tbsp. very finely minced fresh herbs (I used a combination of Italian parsley and Genovese basil)

*NOTES

All-purpose flour is easy to find, but "00" flour is better if you can get your hands on it. The double-zero flour is milled to a very fine texture, and its use results in tender, silky pasta. I have seen it in well-stocked larger supermarkets, gourmet shops and online.

As with bread dough, I have found that hydration of flour for pasta dough is much improved with room temperature or slightly warm water. Cold water makes for very stiff dough that is tougher to knead.

Eggs are more easily separated when cold, but once this is done, cover the bowl of yolks and let it rest at room temperature for at least 30 minutes before you begin mixing the pasta dough.

Most of the time, conventionally-grown citrus is fine. But when you intend to eat any part of the peel, choose organic to avoid chemical pesticides.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Zest the lemon and mince the herbs first, and spread them out on a cutting board so that the add-in ingredients dry out a bit.
2. Combine flours, salt, lemon zest and lightly dried herbs in the bowl of a stand mixer.
3. Combine egg yolks and water in a separate bowl and whisk them together until the mixture is light and frothy.
4. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients, pour the wet ingredients into the center and use the dough hook to do the blending. Though it might seem logical to mix with the beater blade, using the dough hook completes the blending from the center-out, in the same way as the chefs using only a fork to gradually mix the eggs into the flour. Allow the mixer to do this work for you, until the dough mixture is combined but crumbly, and no dry flour remains in the bowl. Add more water, one tablespoon at a time, if needed to achieve this stage.
5. Empty the dough onto your work surface, and knead by hand for *at least* 10 minutes, preferably more like 15 minutes. The dough should be smooth and elastic, with no creases or cracks or lumps. If the dough shows any sign of cracking or breaking, wet your hands and continue to knead, repeating as many times as necessary until the smooth texture is achieved.
6. Wrap the dough tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate the dough ball at least one hour, or up to overnight. Do not refrigerate more than a day.
7. Remove the pasta dough from the fridge (still wrapped) about 30 minutes before you plan to roll it, to remove some of the chill.
8. Set up your pasta-rolling machine, and spoon out a small pile of semolina dough to use for keeping the dough from sticking. Unwrap the pasta dough and use a bench scraper or sharp knife to slice off sections of dough about one inch thick. Keep remaining dough tightly wrapped until ready to roll.
9. Flatten a piece of dough into an oval-shaped disk, then roll it through the pasta machine on the thickest setting. For the first few passes, fold the pressed dough in half and run it through again on the same setting. Next, fold it into thirds, as you would fold up a letter, and turn the dough 90° so that it runs through the machine at a different angle. This helps to reduce curling or bending when the pasta dries later. When the dough feels supple after running through the press several times, begin reducing to thinner setting with each pass. At this point, folding the dough is no longer necessary.
10. When the dough reaches the desired thickness (either the thinnest or next-to-thinnest setting, allow the sheet to dry slightly before cutting into strips or using as ravioli. In my experience with pasta, the cutting and shaping stage seems to work better when the pasta is not super-soft. If you rush directly to cutting it, at least with a machine, the dough tends to stick in the rollers, and it will definitely stick to a ravioli mold.
11. Cut pasta as desired, either with a cutter attachment (if your rolling machine has one), or by hand. The simplest way to cut the pasta by hand is to fold it crosswise multiple times and then use a pizza wheel to cut through the multiple layers. Be sure to dust the pasta very well with extra semolina before hand-cutting it, to minimize sticking.