

Food & Drink

Prep. To the cognoscenti, pasta should be cooked until al dante (tender but still firm to the bite).

How Ugandans get all pasta wrong

From confusing spaghetti with noodles to drowning it in too little water, Uganda's love affair with macaroni is real, so are the myths.

In Uganda, the word *amacaroni* is the common catch all for all manner of pasta, irrespective of whether it is noodles, spaghetti or macaroni. I am referring to the basic eateries which abound all over town and in the suburbs, not the pristine and fancy places.

These are far more sophisticated and acutely aware of various nomenclature in which they belong. I bet you that were one to go around and ask people in Kampala, randomly, what is pasta, you would receive a myriad of answers none of which would be correct. The composition of pasta is wheat and flour. Eggs add colour and richness and can be found in fresh and dried pasta.

Ingredients and texture matter

The key to buying good pasta is to look for that which is made with 100 percent durum wheat, aka, *pasta di semola di grano duro*. Durum wheat is a hard wheat grain and when cooked the pasta will maintain its shape to the finished texture. As a rule of thumb, choose pasta made in Italy, where the composition and the manufacture of dried pasta are controlled by law. In other countries, pasta is often made with ordinary wheat flours or from those blended with durum wheat flour which can result in large or gluey texture when cooked. The most commonly bought type of pasta is the pale yellow plain pasta made with durum wheat and water and tends to give a firmer bite. The more golden yellow egg pasta has a slightly silkier texture. In Italy, homemade pasta made with eggs and flour is saved for special occasions.

Fresh does not always mean better in this case. A quality boxed dried pasta that is imported from Italy may be much better than a pre-pancaked fresh pasta. However, nothing beats truly fresh pasta made with good quality flour, real eggs and no additives. The texture and flavour

of fresh pasta can be better than the dried, but in terms of nutrition there is no difference. Fresh pasta is quick to cook and only requires a brief boil of no more than five minutes. If you overcook, it will become slimy and lose shape. As for fresh pasta, sold in supermarkets and Chinese grocery stores in chiller cabinets, make sure you put them in the fridge as soon as you get home and used within two days of opening.

What about freshness?

For convenience it can be frozen and used within one month. Spinach (pasta Verde) and tomato (regular or sun-dried tomato) pastas are nowadays readily available in many quality Kampala supermarkets. I encourage you to explore chili, garlic and herb flavour pastas as well.

For a quick smart starter or a fancy dinner dish, check out fresh stuffed pastas on display in the chiller cabinet. In particular, the popular fillings are spinach with ricotta and mushroom with garlic and herbs. Serve with butter and a few flakes of parmesan or homemade fresh sauce. *Ravioli* are stuffed square parcels with a serrated like edge and is traditionally filled with spinach and ricotta cheese though nowadays they often have meat filling. *Tortellini* are tiny stuffed rings made from circles of pasta and folded to resemble small ears. They are a specialty of Bologna and just to confuse matters. Larger ones are called *tortellini*. *Tortellini* are small stuffed squares of pasta, and large *Tortellini*. *Cappelletti* also known as little peaked hats are made from egg pasta. *Angolotti* are plump pillows with ruffled edges that normally contain a meat filling. A folly, when making pasta in Uganda, is the scant amount of water people use whenever they are making this much-loved Italian staple. The tendency is to use



Home recipe

Avocado
tomato
mozzarella
pasta salad

BY A. KADUMUKASA
KIRONDE II

A salad made with ingredients the colours flag and a dish

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 1 ½ cups (falle)
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- 200g mo
- 1 large r
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Titbits

One of the biggest follies when making pasta, at least here in Uganda, is the scant amount of water people use whenever they are making this much-loved Italian staple. The tendency is to use as little water as possible as though it was precious holy water.



Kadumukasa
Kironde II

Weekend
Cuisine

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Preparation

Pasta needs plenty of room to move around with freedom and abandon, ergo cook it in your largest saucepan with copious amounts of boiling water.

Figure at the very minimum five litres of boiling water for four people and generally allow 1 ½ tablespoons of salt to the water. However, in the event that you have a very rich, tasty sauce, feel free to use less salt. Sea salt dissolves faster than ordinary salt. Italians never add olive oil to their cooking water but I always add a few large dollops so that the pasta doesn't stick together. The most important thing is to make sure the water is at a constant rolling boil before adding the pasta, and brought back to the boil immediately after adding. Apparently, this will prevent the pasta sticking together. Time the cooking the moment the water returns to the boil and use the instructions on the packet as a guide to the cooking times. Allow 10 to 12 minutes for dried spaghetti, fusil etc.