

BUONA DOMENICA

Penne with Potatoes, Zucchini, and Guanciale

What I especially like about this combination: the mild-mannered zucchini takes on the flavor of the pork, and the potato soaks up the fat and juices, bringing everything together to make a rich sauce that cloaks the pasta. I used yellow potatoes from Avezzano, Abruzzo, also known as *patate del Fucino*, which are appreciated for their rich flavor verging on sweet and for their dense texture that lies somewhere between creamy and floury. This means that they can be employed in any number of ways in the kitchen: mashed, roasted, made into gnocchi, or cubed/mashed up and tossed with pasta, as I've done here. Any good yellow potato will do, as long as it's not waxy or watery.

I used penne pasta for obvious reasons, but any good short, sturdy pasta goes well, including rigatoni, mezze-maniche, ziti, etc.

Makes 3 to 4 first-course servings, or 2 generous main course servings

INGREDIENTS

1 medium-large yellow potato (100 g/3.5 oz), scrubbed

Sea salt

2 thickish slices guanciale (100 g/3.5 oz) cut into strips

Extra-virgin olive oil

2 small cloves garlic, lightly crushed

1/2 sweet red onion, cut into small dice

2 medium zucchini (300 g/10.5 oz), quartered lengthwise, then sliced crosswise into thin wedges

200 g penne rigate or other short, sturdy pasta

Freshly grated pecorino or Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Put the potato in a saucepan and cover with cold water. Add 2 generous pinches of salt. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then lower the flame and boil gently until the potato is tender,

20 to 25 minutes. A cake tester or small knife blade should slide in and out easily. Drain out the water and let the potato cool.

2. Put the guanciale in a dry skillet and set it over medium heat. When the pieces begin to sizzle, turn the heat down to medium-low and cook until the guanciale has rendered several tablespoons of fat and turned crispy-tender. With a skimmer or slotted spoon, transfer the guanciale to a bowl and pour off all but 1 or 2 tablespoons of fat.

3. Add 1 to 2 tablespoons of olive oil to the pork fat in the pan and stir in the garlic, onion, and zucchini. Set over medium heat until the oil starts to sizzle, then lower the heat to medium-low and season with a small pinch of salt and a few grindings of black pepper. Cook for about 10 minutes, until the onion and zucchini have softened. Peel and cube the potato and add it to the skillet, mashing it up a bit with a wooden spoon. Cook gently until all the vegetables are soft and well combined, another 10 minutes or so.

4. Cook the pasta in a pot of boiling salted water until al dente. Using a skimmer or spider, transfer the pasta directly to the pan of vegetables, along with a ladleful or two of cooking water. Stir in the guanciale and toss everything together until well combined. Add a handful of cheese and toss again. Serve in shallow bowls, with a sprinkle of cheese on top.