

BUONA DOMENICA

FUSILLI CORTI WITH SLOW-ROASTED CHERRY TOMATOES AND CREAM

Most of the year I can live without cherry tomatoes. I wheel my grocery cart right past the tough-skinned ones in plastic containers at the supermarket without even thinking about it. But right now, when the stalls at my local farmers' market set out row upon row of glowing red, gold, green, and "black cherry" cherry tomatoes, piled in those little blue-green cardboard containers, I really can't resist scooping up two, three, four pints at a time. Some sit on the kitchen counter, and I snack on them throughout the day as I'm working; others I slow-roast in the oven until they semi-collapse and their juices become syrupy. Then I make this luscious pasta. It's the perfect summer send off.

This is a lightened version of the recipe on p. 142 of my book *The Glorious Vegetables of Italy*. The original calls for 3/4 cup (180 ml) of heavy cream and a cup of grated Parmigiano cheese. I've simply toned down the fat content and relied instead on the starchy pasta cooking water to make an emulsified sauce that beautifully coats the noodles.

On the subject of noodles, I used fusilli corti col buco (short fusilli with a hole) from La Molisana, which for some reason I find really satisfying to eat. Other good shapes include capricci (another great coiled shape but harder to find), gemelli, or penne.

Be sure to plan ahead if you want to make this; it takes about 90 minutes for the cherry tomatoes to slow-roast.

Makes 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 pounds (680 g) ripe cherry tomatoes (about 2 full pints)

Extra-virgin olive oil

Fine sea salt

Several fresh sprigs of thyme or oregano

1 shallot, minced

1/4 cup (60 ml) heavy cream

5 to 10 fresh basil leaves, torn or coarsely chopped

1 pound (454 g) fusilli corti or other short, curly pasta

1/2 cup (50 g) freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, plus more for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oven to 275° F (135° C). Using a tomato knife or a sharp paring knife, cut the cherry tomatoes in half through the stem end. Arrange them, cut-side up on a large, rimmed baking sheet lined with parchment. Drizzle about 3 tablespoons olive oil over them and sprinkle with salt. Scatter a few sprigs of thyme or oregano over them. Roast for 1 1/2 hours, or until they are somewhat puckered but still juicy. (See NOTE below for storing the roasted tomatoes.)

2. Bring a pot of water to a boil over high heat and salt it generously.

3. Pour 2 tablespoon olive oil into a skillet or sauté pan large enough to hold the cooked pasta. Add the minced shallot and set over medium-low heat. Cook, stirring, until the shallot is softened but not browned, about 7 minutes. Scrape in the cherry tomatoes and any juices that have accumulated on the baking sheet. Toss in one or two more herb sprigs if you like and stir in the cream. Heat gently to a simmer over low heat while you cook the pasta.

4. Add the pasta to the boiling water and cook according to the package instructions until just al dente. Using a skimmer or a large slotted spoon, transfer the pasta to the skillet, along with a generous splash of sauce—anywhere from 1/4 to 1/2 cup (60 - 120 ml). Start with the lesser amount and add more as needed. Toss gently until the pasta is well coated with sauce. Stir in the cheese and torn basil leaves and toss some more, adding more water if necessary to keep the sauce silky.

5. Spoon into bowls and serve with more cheese for sprinkling.

NOTE: Slow-roasted cherry tomatoes make an excellent topping for bruschetta or pizza, among other uses. If you want to make a batch to have on hand, let them cool after roasting; then scrape them, along with their juices, into a wide-mouth jar or container. Top off with olive oil to keep the tomatoes submerged, cover tightly, and refrigerate. Stored this way, they will last for at least two weeks. Be sure to bring them to room temperature before using, as the oil may congeal in the refrigerator.