

Italian-American

Pastas

Ultimate Penne alla Vodka with Crispy Pancetta

Prep: 15m

Cook: 25m

Total: 40m

6 servings



Video ref: Sip and Feast (Jim Mumford)

MISE EN PLACE / INGREDIENTS

[10]

- ☐ 1 lb (450g) Bronze-cut durum wheat penne rigate pasta (De Cecco Penne Rigate)
- ☐ 4 oz Diced Italian cured pancetta or thick-cut bacon
- ☐ 2 units Shallots, finely minced
- ☐ 4.5 oz (entire tube) Double concentrated Italian tomato paste (Mutti Double Concentrated Tomato Paste)
- ☐ 0.33 cup Standard 80-proof neutral vodka (Tito's or Smirnoff)
- ☐ 0.75 cup Heavy whipping cream
- ☐ 1 cup Freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
- ☐ 0.5 tsp Crushed red pepper flakes (Peperoncino)
- ☐ 0.25 cup Fresh basil leaves, torn
- ☐ 1 tbsp Kosher salt (for pasta water and seasoning)

US SUPERMARKET BRAND GUIDE

Tube Tomato Paste: Mutti Double Concentrated Tomato Paste

Pure concentrated Parma tomatoes that caramelize cleanly without harsh tin can metallic aftertastes. • Pasta sauce aisle.

Bronze-Cut Penne Rigate: De Cecco Penne Rigate No. 41

Rough chalky texture that grips the emulsified cream sauce tenaciously. • Pasta aisle.

COOKING SEQUENCE & CHECKPOINTS

1

Crisp the Pancetta

6 min

Bring a large pot of water seasoned with the kosher salt to a boil. Meanwhile, in a large skillet over medium heat, fry the diced pancetta for 6 minutes until golden and crispy. Remove with a slotted spoon and reserve 2 tbsp rendered fat in the pan.

✓ Checkpoint: Crispy browned pancetta nuggets.

2

Caramelize Paste & Shallots

7 min

Sauté the minced shallots and red pepper flakes in the rendered fat for 3 minutes. Squeeze in the whole tube of tomato paste and fry for 4 minutes, stirring constantly, until it darkens to a deep brick red.

✓ Checkpoint: Deep mahogany, sweetly caramelized tomato paste.

3

Deglaze Vodka, Simmer Cream & Boil Penne

7 min

Drop the 1 lb penne rigate into the boiling salted water and cook until 1 minute shy of al dente, reserving 1/2 cup starchy pasta water before draining. Meanwhile, pour the vodka into the skillet, scrape up the brown fond, and simmer for 2 minutes to cook off raw alcohol. Lower heat, pour in the heavy cream, and simmer gently for 5 minutes.

✓ Checkpoint: Glowing, smooth orange-pink sauce and al dente penne.

4

Toss with Pasta & Cheese

5 min

Toss the drained penne directly into the simmering vodka sauce with the 1/2 cup reserved pasta water over medium heat for 1 to 2 minutes until glossy and al dente. Pull from heat and fold in the freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, crispy pancetta, and torn fresh basil.

✓ Checkpoint: Creamy, perfectly emulsified pasta feast.

FOOD SAFETY & INTERNAL TEMPERATURE: ≥165°F (74°C) SAFE INTERNAL COOKING AND SERVING TEMPERATURE (HOLD HOT AT ≥140°F / 60°C)

USDA/FDA Food Safety Standard: Cook to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F (74°C) for microbiological safety. Hold cooked food hot at ≥140°F (60°C) prior to serving and refrigerate any leftovers to ≤40°F (4°C) within 2 hours to prevent bacterial spore growth.

MASTER DONENESS CHECKPOINT:

Lustrous, velvety orange-pink sauce filling the cavities of each al dente penne noodle, punctuated by crunchy nuggets of browned pancetta.

WHY IT WORKS:

Alcohol-Soluble Flavor Release: Vodka acts as a solvent that releases aroma compounds trapped in tomatoes that are insoluble in water or fat, marrying cream and acid into an unbreakable velvet emulsion.

TROUBLESHOOTING:

The sauce tastes sharp with raw alcohol fumes: Always boil the vodka vigorously for 2 full minutes until reduced by half before stirring in heavy cream.