

Pasta with sardines (Pasta con le Sarde)

Umami, uncomplicated: We have Palermo, Sicily, to thank for the inspiration for our version of this ancient dish, traditionally made with fresh-caught sardines and fresh-picked wild fennel. We make it pantry-friendly by using tinned sardines and other shelf-stable ingredients, such as capers and peperoncini, to give this pasta a punch of briny umami. So forgo the box of mac and cheese or the canned soup and reach for pantry ingredients you bought ages ago that are just begging to wake up your palette. This dish will make you think you're a genius for having them on hand.

Ingredients

1 pound spaghetti
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil, divided
1/4 cup capers, rinsed and drained, and patted dry
1/2 cup panko breadcrumbs
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup chopped parsley
2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
2 dried Calabrian chile peppers, or peperoncino, crushed
2 (3.75 ounces each) cans boneless skinless sardines in olive oil
Juice from 1/2 lemon

Directions

Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Add the pasta. Cook for about a minute less than the package suggests, until al dente.

While the pasta cooks, heat 1/4 cup oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat, add the capers and fry for 1 to 2 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon to a bowl. Add the breadcrumbs, season with salt and pepper and toast for 1 to 2 minutes, stirring until golden brown. Remove to same bowl with capers and toss with the chopped parsley. Add the oil from the tins of sardines to the skillet with 2 tablespoons of the extra virgin olive oil. Add the garlic and peperoncini, cook for 30 seconds then add the sardines, breaking up slightly with a wooden spoon and cooking to heat through. Keep warm over low heat.

When pasta is ready, drain, reserving some of the cooking water. Add the pasta to the skillet, along with some of about 1/4 cup of the pasta water, salt, pepper and lemon juice. Toss to coat and create a creamy sauce, adding remaining 2 tablespoons of extra olive oil and/or some more pasta water if needed. Transfer to individual plates and top with the toasted breadcrumbs, parsley and caper mixture.

total time: 20 minutes

active prep: 20 minutes

serves: 4

difficulty: *easy*