

Spicy Cavatappi with Tuna and Capers

One of the great mysteries of Italian Nonnas worldwide is that they are prepared to feed you something delicious, even if you've dropped in unannounced. You pull up your chair, nibble on a snack, and in what feels like an instant, a hot, spicy, steaming dish of pasta is pushed in front of you and all is right with the world. This is one of those kinds of dishes. Quick to make and based on pantry staples, it's excellent for a weeknight or a last minute dinner party. And it's so simple, you'll have plenty of time to call your nonna to plan your next visit.

ingredients

3 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
1, 28-ounce can San Marzano tomatoes
4 ounces pancetta, cut into ¼-inch cubes
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
2 teaspoons crushed red pepper
1 can tuna in olive oil, drained
¼ cup capers, rinsed and drained
1 pound cavatappi
6 fresh basil leaves

instructions

Bring 6 quarts of water and 3 tablespoons of kosher salt to a rolling boil.

Pour the tomatoes into a bowl. Crush them by hand and set aside.

In a deep saute pan, add the pancetta and slowly raise the heat to medium to render the fat, about 5 minutes. Once fat has rendered, raise the heat and add the olive oil. Heat over medium-high heat. When it shimmers, add the garlic and crushed red pepper and cook for 30 seconds. Add the reserved crushed tomatoes and 1 teaspoon of salt. Smash any large pieces of tomato with a wooden spoon. Bring to a simmer and cook for 5 minutes. Add the tuna and capers and simmer over medium low heat until sauce has thickened slightly, about 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, add the cavatappi to the boiling water. Cook one minute shy of al dente, according to the package instructions.

Reserve ½ cup pasta water and drain pasta.

Adjust seasonings as needed. Add the pasta to the saute pan along with ¼ cup of pasta water. Raise the heat to high and toss to coat. Add more pasta water as needed to create a silky smooth consistency that lightly coats the pasta. Serve hot, garnished with fresh basil leaves and additional crushed red pepper as desired.

total time: 25 minutes
active prep: 15 minutes
serves: 4
difficulty: *easy*