

Vodka Rigatoni

The history behind Vodka Rigatoni (or Rigatoni alla Vodka, as it is also called) is somewhat unsettled. Some say it's Italian, others say it's decidedly Italian-American, but whatever the true history may be, one thing is certain: it is the kind of craveable comfort food that everyone adores. Our version is all that and more. The rich, velvety sauce coating al dente noodles makes you feel like Nonna's favorite again.

Ingredients

3 tablespoons plus ½ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more as needed
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
½ medium onion, finely diced
4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
½ teaspoon crushed red pepper, plus more for serving
4-5 ounces double concentrate tomato paste from a tube or 1 can tomato paste (6 ounces)
3 tablespoons vodka
1¼ cups heavy cream
1 pound rigatoni
½ cup finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for serving
3 ounces sliced prosciutto, cut crosswise into ⅓-inch strips
¼ cup picked and torn basil leaves, about 12 leaves

Instructions

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

In a deep saute pan, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. When it shimmers, add the onion and ½ teaspoon salt. Cook until translucent and tender, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and crushed red pepper. Cook for 30 seconds until fragrant – be careful not to burn the garlic, or you'll ruin the flavor of the dish. Make a clearing in the center of the pan, or a "hot spot." Add the tomato paste and caramelize in the hot spot 3 to 5 minutes – the color will grow deeper as it caramelizes. Stir to incorporate the tomato paste and onion mixture.

Remove the pan from heat and add the vodka. Return to the heat and reduce, cooking for 2 minutes until small bubbles rapidly surface. Be aware that it could ignite if cooking over a gas flame – just step back if it does, it will only flame up for a second. Once reduced, add cream and stir to incorporate. Bring to a simmer. Remove from heat.

Add rigatoni to salted water. Cook until al dente or one minute shy of the package instructions. Reserve ½ cup pasta water. Drain the pasta.

Return sauce to stove over medium heat. Add the pasta to the sauce and stir to ensure pasta is coated by the sauce. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup pasta water and stir to incorporate to make a velvety sauce. Add more pasta water if needed to get the correct consistency. Remove from heat. Add the cheese and strew the prosciutto across the pasta so that it doesn't clump. Stir to incorporate. Garnish with basil leaves, additional cheese and crushed red pepper, if desired.

total time: 20 minutes

active prep: 15 minutes

serves: 4

difficulty: *easy*