

There's always spaghetti, but here are some kookier options:



Since this is Mother's Day month (remember when you'd ask, "Why isn't there a Children's Day?" and a teacher/parent/random adult would answer, "Every day is Children's Day!"), I spent some time with my favorite mother—Fran—to work out a recipe with a spring theme. Fran is not only my favorite mom, she's also my favorite cook—adaptable too. I have three sisters and one brother, all of whom wanted it their way. Me, I like my food plain and simple. The cool thing about pasta primavera is that it's easily adjustable; it's gentle enough for the weakest palate, but the adventurous eater can go loco.

Learning to cook from Fran is almost impossible. She's just such a natural that she can't explain what she does. Every recipe starts with a "nice amount of olive oil" and browning the garlic "nicely, nicely." When you ask for measurements, it's always "about 2 tablespoons" but in reality is more like half a cup. Don't worry: I included lots of specifics for this recipe (it's so easy you can't screw it up, anyway). It serves five.

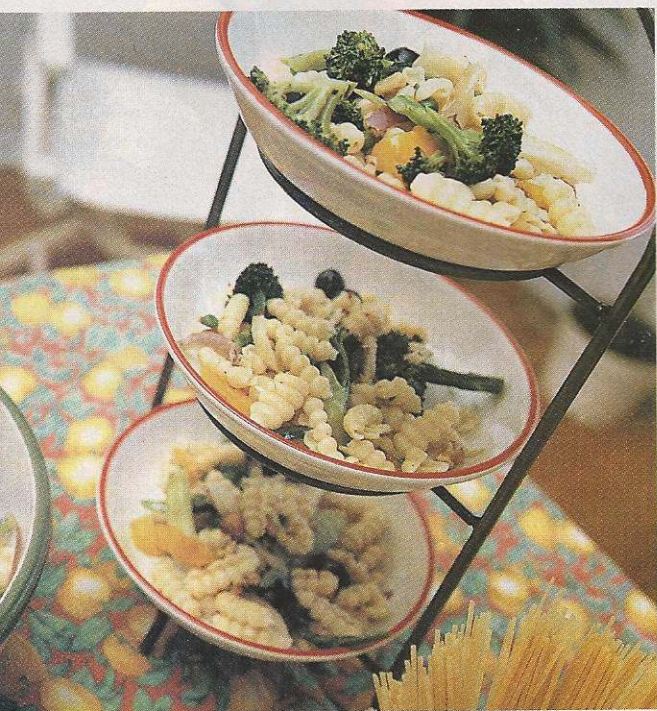
Pasta Primavera

- 1 lb. pasta of your choice
- ½ cup plus 4 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 whole cloves garlic
- salt and pepper
- 1 bunch broccoli, chopped, tough stems discarded
- ½ red onion, diced
- 1 bulb fennel, thinly sliced
- 1 yellow and 1 red bell pepper, diced, seeds and core discarded
- ¼ lb. fresh green beans
- ⅓ cup pine nuts, toasted in a 275° oven in shallow pan until golden
- chopped scallions, parsley and/or red pepper flakes to taste

Put a minimum of 4 quarts of cold water into a large pot. Add 2 tsp. of salt. Bring water to a rolling boil. Throw in the pasta and stir with a long-handled spoon or fork. Cook, stirring occasionally, until pasta is al dente (literally, "to the tooth"), meaning firm in the center when you bite into it—in other words, don't let it get mushy. In the meantime, brown the garlic "nicely, nicely" over medium heat in ½ cup olive oil with some salt and fresh pepper to taste (watch



Pastarama a La mama



carefully—garlic cooks quickly and loses its flavor if overcooked). Drain the pasta well and pour into a large serving bowl. Then toss with the garlic and oil. At this point you can remove the garlic (which is what I do, but Tracy the Garlic Queen wouldn't dare). Now, in a heavy skillet over high heat, quickly stir-fry the chopped veggies in 4 tbsp. of olive oil until tender-crisp. Toss vegetables with pasta and sprinkle with toasted pine nuts. Add some parsley, chopped scallions and/or red pepper flakes if you are so inclined. That's the basic recipe. You can elaborate on it by using jalapeño peppers, corn, carrots or any other kind of veggies you like. (Pastina, which is very tiny, delicate pasta, is best with just peas and fresh diced tomatoes.) But steer clear of spinach, eggplant and zucchini—Fran says they give pasta a bitter taste. Mother knows best....