

Orecchiette with Sausage

and Chard

START TO FINISH:
35 minutes

SERVINGS:
4

12 ounces orecchiette pasta
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
10 medium garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 pound hot or sweet Italian sausage, casings removed
2 teaspoons ground fennel
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
¾ cup dry white wine
½ cup drained Peppadew peppers, finely chopped
1 pound Swiss or rainbow chard, stems sliced ½ inch thick and leaves roughly chopped, reserved separately
Parmesan cheese, grated, to serve

Orecchiette, or “little ears,” are a round pasta from Italy’s Puglia region with a cup-like shape that does a great job of catching sauce. We started with the classic pairing of Italian sausage—sweet or hot styles both worked. But instead of the customary broccoli rabe, we used chard, which has an earthier and less bitter taste. Chard leaves wilt quickly, while the stems have a succulent, crisp texture similar to celery. To bring out the best in both, we followed Nancy Silverton’s lead from “The Mozza Cookbook,” cooking the leaves and stems separately. Can’t find orecchiette? Farfalle makes a good substitute. Serve with plenty of grated Parmesan cheese.

Don’t discard the chard stems; they add flavor and texture. Make sure to keep the stems and leaves separate after prepping; they go into the skillet at different times.

In a large pot, bring 4 quarts of water to a boil. Add the pasta and 2 tablespoons salt and cook until al dente. Reserve ¾ cup of the cooking water, then drain the pasta and return it to the pot. Set aside.

Meanwhile, in a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium, heat the oil and garlic, stirring, until the garlic is light golden brown, 2 to 4 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the garlic to a paper towel-lined plate and set aside. Pour off and reserve the garlic oil.

Add the sausage to the skillet and cook over medium, stirring and breaking it up, until lightly browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the fennel and pepper flakes and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in the wine and reserved garlic and cook, scraping up any browned bits, until the liquid is reduced and the skillet is nearly dry, 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in the Peppadews, then scrape the mixture into the pot with the pasta. Stir and set the pot over low heat.

Return the skillet to medium-high and heat 2 tablespoons of the reserved garlic oil until shimmering. Stir in the chard stems and ½ teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring, until lightly browned and softened, about 3 minutes. Add the chard leaves and cook, stirring, until wilted and tender, about 3 minutes.

Scrape the chard mixture into the pot with the pasta and stir in up to ½ cup of the reserved pasta water; add only as much as needed to get a creamy consistency. Taste and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a serving platter then serve with Parmesan and drizzled with the remaining garlic oil.