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EXCLUSIVE

# PASTA GRANNIES

VICKY  
BENNISON

THE SECRETS  
OF ITALY'S BEST HOME COOKS





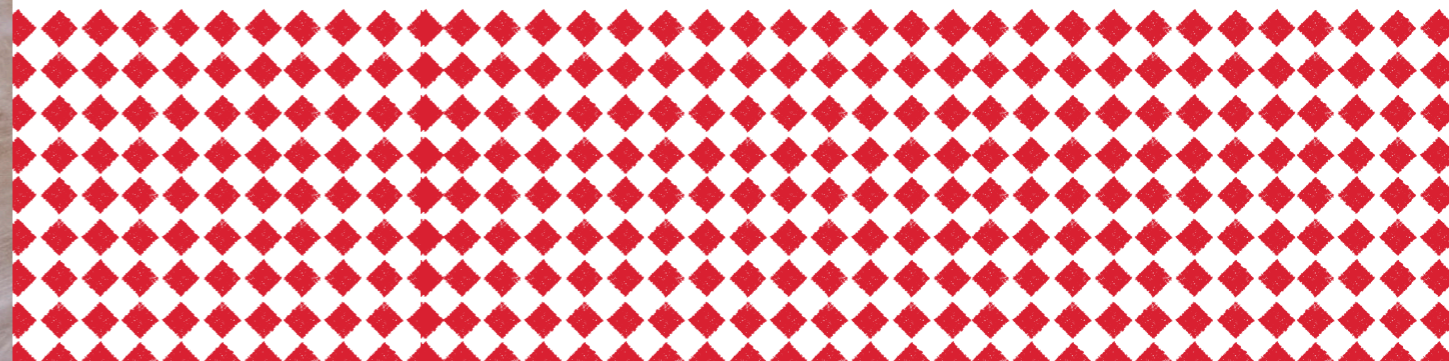
Welcome to your sneak peek recipe booklet of *Pasta Grannies:  
The Secrets of Italy's Best Home Cooks* by Vicky Bennison.

In this booklet you'll find preview recipes from the book, along with  
a bonus recipe and unseen photography.

Enjoy!

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*Hardie Grant*  
BOOKS



# HOW TO MAKE EGG PASTA DOUGH

The nonna way is to decide on how many eggs you are going to use, and use one handful of flour for every egg. This handful equates to 100 g (3½ oz) of flour per egg.

## Step 1: Weigh out your ingredients

Allow 100 g (3½ oz) 00 flour (or plain/all-purpose flour) per person for a main course-sized portion. You need 55 g (2 oz) egg without its shell for every 100 g (3½ oz) flour.

For example, if you are making pasta for four people, you will need 400 g (14 oz/3⅓ cups) flour and 220 g (7¾ oz) egg, which most of the time will mean four hen eggs. But weighing out your ingredients means you can also use other eggs, such as duck or turkey, which is something the nonne do – Velia regularly uses turkey eggs as that is what she has running around her backyard.

If your eggs are on the small side, add a bit of water or another egg yolk to bring the quantity up to the right weight. If your weight is slightly over, use the egg shell to scoop out excess egg white.

## Step 2: Mix them together

Tip the flour onto your board in a heap. Use your fingers to make a well in the centre, making sure it's not too wide or the rim too low, otherwise your egg mix will overflow.

Pour the eggs into the well. Take a fork (or use your fingers) and scramble the eggs together. They are mixed sufficiently when you lift the fork and you have a homogeneous, non-clumpy looking liquid that falls smoothly from your fork.

Draw your fork round the inside of the flour wall, so a small quantity of flour falls into the egg mixture. Whisk it in, smooching any lumps, so you gradually create a batter. Repeat until you have a mixture that won't run all over the board. At this point you can cave in the flour walls and mix in the rest of the flour with a bench scraper by scraping the flour inwards and over the batter. Of course, you can beat the egg and flour together in a bowl, even with a food mixer, but it's not as fun.

Mop up any flour with your dough and give it a quick knead. If it is sticky, add a tablespoon of flour and knead it in. It is better to adjust your dough now than later.

If it is not sticky and you have some flour on the board, scrape off the excess, so you have a nice clean board to knead your dough. Nonne sieve any excess flour and reuse it.

The dough should feel soft and pillowy, but not too sticky.

## Step 3: Knead the dough

Knead the dough for 10 minutes minimum. Think of your hands as waves: the heels of your hands push the dough away from you, while your fingers pull it back. Once your dough has become a log, turn it 90-degrees and fold it in half and continue kneading. You want to work at a brisk pace, as air is the enemy of decent pasta – it will dry it out, so don't dawdle. If the pasta feels too dry, simply damp your hands with water to put moisture back into the dough.

Kneading develops the gluten and elasticity of the dough: it should feel silky and smooth. When you press your thumb into the dough, it should bounce back. Some nonne judge their dough to be done when they can see small holes in it if sliced through the middle. To knead, you can also use a dough hook on your food mixer.

## Step 4: Leave the dough to rest

At this point, place the dough in a lidded bowl and cover it to stop it from drying out. Cling film (plastic wrap) is good too, but you may not want to use it. You can also use a tea towel, but it's important it hasn't been washed with perfumed detergent as this will add an odour to your pasta. Leave the dough at room temperature for 30 minutes. This relaxes the gluten and makes it easier to roll out.

You can also leave it in the fridge overnight. The colour will darken, but it will taste the same. It's important to bring the pasta back to room temperature before you try rolling it.

## Step 5: Roll out the dough

Nonne all have their own technique for rolling out. Some smooth out the dough over their pin with a dowager breast stroke in varying degrees of stateliness; others approach it with all the intensity of a curling team scrubbing ice in front of their stone. Whatever the sporting analogy, it's most definitely an upper arm workout. Those in Emilia Romagna pride themselves in being able to roll a perfect circle. This isn't necessary but it looks gorgeous.

Julia Ficara, who runs handmade pasta classes in Rome at her cookery school Grano e Farina, recommends the following technique because it's efficient and back-friendly. This is wordy – but watching the Pasta Grannies 'How to Roll Pasta' video on YouTube will help bring this explanation to life.

Before you start, remember to keep your pasta floured throughout the process.

Cup your hands over your rolling pin so your wrists nearly touch the pasta board. Flatten your dough with your pin, turning it a few degrees at a time in the same direction; this helps to keep it circular.

When it is the size of a plate, start with your hands at hip width and roll the top third of your dough (furthest away from you) by following the curve of the circle and drawing your hands inwards as you push the pin away from you. Your hands will meet in the middle. Stop the pin before it reaches the very edge. Roll the dough four times.

Turn the pasta from 12 to one and repeat going round the clock.

You will end up with a bump of pasta in the middle. To get rid of it, flip the outer edge of pasta over the pin. Hold the pasta with one hand, and place the other hand on the dough to stop it moving. Give the pin a tug with the pasta hand to create a snug fit around the pin. Roll the dough over the pin towards you.

Move your hands wider, stick your elbows out and, pressing down, roll the pasta out two or three times. This will flatten the thicker central zone of your pasta. Finish with the pasta rolled up and turn it 90 degrees, opening it out across the board.

Repeat this process until the *sfoglia* (the pasta sheet) is too large to move comfortably by hand. At this stage, you will need to roll it up around the pin and turn it, as described above. Allow your pin to roll on its own across the dough to remove any air after you have turned it.

You can let your *sfoglia* drape over the edge of the board – allow about a third, no more, otherwise the whole thing will slip off. This helps to anchor and stretch it, but also it means you don't have to stretch too far over the board, messing up your back. Remember not to lean against the pasta.

Do not attempt to roll the entire sheet (until you feel expert) or change rolling direction; just keep rolling the outer third directly in front of you. As the dough gets bigger, your arms and elbows start quite far apart. Eventually, you will end up with pasta you can see through. It should feel like heavy linen.

To check your pasta is evenly rolled, roll up a third, hold onto the edges (it will fall off the pin otherwise) and hold it up to the light. Darker patches mean thicker

dough and you haven't rolled it uniformly, so you will want to go back over these areas.

Leave your pasta sheet to dry on the board for 5 minutes. For tagliolini, tagliatelle and pappardelle, you can now flour it, roll it up very gently (like a carpet) into a log and it's ready for cutting.



FRANCO AND  
ALESSANDRA'S  
CORZETTI WITH FRESH  
MARJORAM DRESSING

FOR 6 PEOPLE

FOR THE PASTA

600 g (1 lb 7 oz/3½ cups) 00 flour or plain (all-purpose) flour (it doesn't need to be the more finely ground 00 flour)

5 egg yolks, plus 1 whole egg, beaten about 150 ml (5½ fl oz/scant ⅔ cup) dry white wine (enough to bring the dough together)

FOR THE DRESSING

100 ml (3½ fl oz/scant ½ cup) Ligurian extra-virgin olive oil or other grassy-tasting olive oil

120 g (4 oz) Italian pine nuts  
25 g (1 oz) fresh marjoram leaves  
2 garlic cloves

First, make the pasta. Tip the flour onto a pasta board or into a bowl and make a well in the middle. Add the beaten egg yolks plus whole egg. Use a fork to mix the flour into the eggs and then gradually pour in the wine. Bring the dough together. Knead until it is smooth and silky. This will take around 10 minutes. Cover the dough with a tea towel (or put it in a lidded bowl) and leave it to rest for at least 15 minutes.

Liguria looks like it has been stapled to the mountains with the motorway that loops down its length, a rumpled shoulder seam of Italy. Its tumbled terrain is inhospitable to mechanised large-scale agriculture, and so market gardeners still flourish. Consequently, Liguria's local food markets have avoided the fate of so many in Italy, with their lacklustre stalls reselling produce from major distributors. In Chiavari there is an open-air market with banks of newspaper-wrapped posies of Genovese basil and crimped tomatoes smelling like they had been grown in soil and sunshine – for me, it's a dusty, herbal, hazy afternoon version of geranium leaves.

We had been given a tour of the town by the totally charming Franco Casoni and his wife, Alessandra. Franco is an acclaimed wood sculptor specialising in figureheads for boats, with a sideline in making stamps for coin-shaped pasta called *corzetti*. His tiny workshop is an Aladdin's cave of carvings: nymphs, Neptune faces and mermaids with buoyant breasts waiting for a life at sea.

Keeping the board, pin and dough well floured, roll out the dough until it is about the same thickness as a foil-wrapped chocolate coin (3 mm). As Alessandra explains, if you roll the dough too thinly the patterns from the two sides of the stamp will cancel each other out.

If you have a stamp, use the cup end of the cylinder block to stamp out the circles in the dough with a twisting motion – it's the same as cutting scone or cookie dough. Place the disc on the engraved end of the stamp block and press down with the handle. The result will be a double-sided embossed corzetto. Repeat until you have used all the dough. If you don't have a stamp, use a small glass or cookie cutter.

Bring a large pan of water to a rolling boil, add a teaspoon of salt, return the water to a boil and shovel in the pasta. Cook for 4 minutes, until the pasta tastes cooked and feels firm and not soggy to bite. Drain.

While the pasta is cooking, warm the oil in a small pan and add the pine nuts, marjoram and garlic. Leave them to bathe in gentle bubbles for 4 minutes. Keep a close eye on the pan, as you don't want the pine nuts to burn, but they can turn a little golden. Remove the garlic cloves and pour the dressing over the pasta. Eat immediately.



## FLORIANNA AND ISANA'S MUSHROOM AND HAM LASAGNA

FOR 6 PEOPLE

### FOR THE PASTA

300 g (10½ oz/2½ cups) 00 flour  
3 eggs

### FOR THE BÉCHAMEL

80 g (3 oz) butter  
80 g (3 oz/2/3 cup) flour  
1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) milk  
3 egg yolks  
salt and pepper

### FOR THE FILLING

40 g (1½ oz) parsley, stems removed  
2 garlic cloves, finely sliced  
olive or sunflower oil, for frying  
600 g (1 lb 5 oz) mushrooms, sliced  
140 g (5 oz) thinly sliced cooked ham  
(e.g. prosciutto cotto), shredded  
300 g (10½ oz) Emmental, grated  
salt

Make the dough as described in How to Make Egg Pasta Dough. Roll the dough out to a thickness of around 1 mm. Use a knife to cut it into pieces roughly one-third to half the size of your baking dish, which should be about 30 x 40 cm (12 x 16 in) and have deep sides. Bigger pieces are more difficult to handle at the blanching stage, but make one piece that fits your dish exactly.

For the béchamel, melt the butter in a saucepan. Add the flour, whisking continuously, to form a roux and cook for around 2 minutes. Slowly, a little at a time, pour in the milk, continuing to whisk to avoid any lumps. When all the milk has been added, bring the mixture to the boil, whisking constantly, until it has turned into a thick sauce the consistency of custard. Turn down the heat to low and whisk in

Florianna and Isana are glamorous identical twins. Their apartment resounds with raucous laughter and the two of them finishing off each other's sentences. It took us a few minutes to work out that Isana is the slightly quieter twin.

When they rolled out their sfoglia, it was a perfect circle. Florianna explained, 'We were taught by our grandmother, and grandpa was keen we should follow tradition and the sfoglia should be circular. He used to threaten us with his cane if we didn't.' 'I think it was in jest,' said Isana. They both laughed again.

*Goccia d'oro* means 'golden drop', referring to the egg yolks that enrich the béchamel sauce, and it is a popular lasagna in the Romagna region of Italy.

the egg yolks. Season with salt and pepper to taste and set aside.

Chop the parsley enough to lose its leafiness, then add the sliced garlic and chop them together so the garlic looks like fine breadcrumbs. Or pulse them together in a small blender.

Heat a good glug of oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat. Add the mushrooms and season with a pinch of salt. Cook the mushrooms for 5–10 minutes, until they're soft, glossy and have collapsed, then add the parsley mixture and cook for another couple of minutes. Set aside.

Bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil and have a large pot or bowl of cold water placed nearby. Carefully drop 2 sheets of pasta into the boiling water for 2 minutes, then remove with a slotted spoon and immediately dunk in the cold water to stop them cooking further. Transfer the cooked sheets to a clean tea towel and pat dry.

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F/Gas 4). To assemble the lasagna, spoon a very thin layer of béchamel onto the bottom of the dish. Place a layer of pasta on top, trying not to overlap sheets if possible (cut some sheets to fit, if needed). Next, add another layer of béchamel – be more generous this time – spreading it out with a spoon so that it reaches the edges. Top this with some of the shredded ham, then a layer of mushrooms, a handful of Emmental and another layer of pasta. Repeat this order until you've used up all your ingredients, finishing with the pasta sheet that fits the whole dish.

Bake the lasagna for 40 minutes. The top should be golden and crunchy and can be cracked into and eaten straight away. 'It's the best bit!' says Florianna. The lasagna will taste best if left to stand for 15 minutes before serving.






Inspired by the hugely popular YouTube channel of the same name, *Pasta Grannies* is a wonderful collection of time-perfected Italian recipes from the people who have spent a lifetime cooking for love, not a living: Italian grandmothers.

Featuring over 80 easy and accessible recipes from all over Italy, you will be transported into the very heart of the Italian home to learn how to make great-tasting Italian food. Pasta styles range from *pici* – a type of hand-rolled spaghetti that is simple to make – to *lumachelle della duchessa* – tiny, ridged, cinnamon-scented tubes that take patience and dexterity.

More than just a compendium of dishes, *Pasta Grannies* tells the extraordinary stories of these ordinary women and shows you that with the right know how, truly authentic Italian cooking is simple, beautiful and entirely achievable.

THANK YOU FOR ORDERING PASTA GRANNIES.  
THE FULL BOOK WILL ARRIVE WITH YOU SHORTLY AFTER PUBLICATION:

17th October 2019 (UK)  
29th October 2019 (US)  
1st November 2019 (Australia & New Zealand)

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*Hardie Grant*

B O O K S

