

Macaroni

Macaroni is such an incredibly versatile little piece of pasta that it deserves its own celebration—July 7th!

The main difference between pasta and macaroni is that macaroni is a sub-category of pasta. Macaroni is a variety of dry pasta made with durum wheat, which typically does not contain eggs. While many people think the elbow-shaped tube gives macaroni its name, it is actually the kind of dough used to make the noodle. The macaroni noodle can be formed into shells, spirals, and many other shapes. Americans like macaroni, and elbow macaroni is the most common form found in the United States.

Through MyPlate, the USDA encourages Americans to include grains in every meal. These dietary guidelines state that grains should make up at least one-fourth of your plate. A rough estimate for adults is 6 to 8 ounces per day. One cup of cooked elbow macaroni has approximately 220 calories.

There is a wide range of macaroni products for sale. It can be made with various grain flours and is sometimes flavored with other ingredients. Choose high-quality noodles, and be sure to check the expiration date. Dried, fresh, and cooked pasta needs to be stored differently. Dried pasta can be stored for up to one year if kept in a cool, dry place. Follow the first-in, first-out rule and use up packages you have had longest before opening new ones. If storing fresh pasta, it can be kept in the refrigerator or freezer. Cooked pasta will keep up to five days refrigerated or can be frozen for more extended storage.

When cooking pasta, it is essential to pay attention to detail. Bring 5 quarts of water to a rolling boil for every pound of pasta. Once water is boiling, add about 2 tablespoons of coarse sea salt per 5 quarts of water. Some people are worried about using too much salt, but the pasta will not absorb all the salt. Add the pasta and stir to keep it from sticking. Some people add oil to the water to keep it from sticking, but this will cause your sauce to not stick to the pasta. Taste the pasta as you get close to the end of the estimated cooking time. You will want to see if your pasta is al dente a few minutes before your cook time is complete. The pasta should be tender, with a slightly white center and a firm bite. Undercooked pasta is chewy and hard. Overcooked, the noodles will be limp and soggy. Once the pasta is al dente, turn the heat off and quickly drain the pasta into a colander in the sink. The noodles will still be wet and should not be rinsed off. If you rinse the pasta, it will not have the starch water that helps the sauce stick to the pasta. Pasta will also cool when it is rinsed, so the sauce will not absorb. Pasta should only be rinsed when used for a cold dish such as pasta salad. Cold pasta should use rinsed pasta because this helps stop the pasta's cooking process so that the pasta will not become soggy and soft. Toss the pasta in a warmed saucepan with your prepared sauce. Cook the pasta in the sauce for about 2 minutes to incorporate all the flavors. The pasta is now perfect and ready to serve!

Like any homemade dish, using fresh ingredients is essential for the most delicious result. Freshly grated cheese is a better option than shredded cheese because pre-shredded cheese has ingredients to prevent clumping. Use a combination of different kinds of melting cheese for an even better flavor and texture. Amp up the dish with spices and seasonings.

Make your favorite dish using macaroni noodles! When using macaroni, you really cannot go wrong! Whether hot or cold, it won't matter as long as it's delicious.

(Sources: www.dietaryguidelines.gov; myplate.gov; nationaltoday.com; nutritiondata.self.com; tasteofhome.com)