

Spaghetti Alla Carbonara

Serves 4-6

Another relative of Pasta alla Gricia's (page 71) is this Roman-born staple, which is sometimes referred to as "coal miner's spaghetti." While the word carbonara makes obvious reference to carbon, it's also an Italian term for "charcoal burner." Imagine hungry, soot-encased miners getting a hot meal cooked over the very source they're extracting from the earth. This Gricia variation—a favorite of our kids—adds protein by way of the egg. Cream is often used in American versions. The best way to get that rich, milky texture is to let the raw egg develop into a velvety consistency when added to the cooked pasta that has been loosened with a little bit of pasta water. Also, we suggest avoiding bacon as a substitute for guanciale: bacon's smokiness would change the whole flavor profile.

Kosher salt

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, plus more for serving

¼ pound guanciale, sliced (or diced pancetta or prosciutto)

2 garlic cloves, sliced

1 pound spaghetti

1 large egg

3 large egg yolks

½ cup freshly grated Pecorino cheese

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, for serving

In an 8- to 12-quart pot, bring 6 quarts of salted water to a rolling boil.

Meanwhile, in a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the guanciale and cook for 7 to 10 minutes, or until golden brown. Add the garlic and sauté for 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and transfer with the rendered fat to a ceramic bowl to cool.

Add the spaghetti to the boiling water and use a wooden fork to stir the pasta so it won't stick together. Cook until al dente. Ladle out 1/2 cup of the pasta water, then drain the pasta and put it in another large ceramic bowl.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the whole egg, egg yolks, Pecorino, and pepper. Whisk in the cooled guanciale. Add to the bowl of hot pasta and toss until completely mixed, adding some of the reserved pasta water for desired creaminess. Serve immediately, sprinkled with Parmesan and a drizzle of olive oil.

IMPORTANTE! Use the best, freshest possible organic eggs, since there are raw eggs in this recipe. The best way to check the freshness is to fill a deep bowl with water, then put the eggs in one at a time. If an egg sinks right away, it's fresh—it indicates a minimum amount of air inside. If it floats, don't use it.