



Craig Lee / Special to The Chronicle; styling by Sophie Brickman

Spaghetti con le Noci

Serves 4

The thick puree of nuts, olive oil and cheese is a type of pesto. A little bit of thyme is important — it anchors the pasta with an herbal bouquet and adds more flavor.

3 to 4 ounces shelled hazelnuts or walnuts (about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup hazelnuts or 1 cup walnuts)

4 to 5 cloves garlic, chopped

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup extra virgin olive oil + more as needed

12 ounces spaghetti

Salt

1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves or $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon dried thyme, to taste

1 ounce freshly grated Parmesan or pecorino cheese, about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup

Black pepper, to taste

Instructions: If using hazelnuts, toast them in a single layer in a large, heavy ungreased frying pan set over medium heat, until they become flecked with dark brown spots, stirring and moving them to avoid burning. They will be ready when their skins split and start to fall off. Or, place them on a rimmed baking sheet and toast in a 400° oven for about 10 minutes; after about 5 minutes, rotate the baking sheet.

Once hazelnuts are toasted, wrap the still-hot nuts tightly in a clean, somewhat

fluffy towel, then rub the nuts against each other, letting the friction rub the skins away. The skins should adhere to the towel.

If using walnuts, toast them if you like, but there is no skin to rub off.

Grind the garlic with a little salt in a blender, then add the nuts and oil and process until the mixture becomes coarse and mealy. If necessary, whirl in more olive oil to form a thinnish paste. Turn off the blender, but leave the pesto there.

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil, then add the spaghetti and cook until al dente; drain and reserve about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups cooking water.

Place the spaghetti in a large, heavy pan over medium heat. Scrape the nut paste into the pot and toss with the spaghetti. Pour about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the reserved pasta water into the blender, swirl around to loosen any remaining nut mixture, then add it to the pasta. Add the thyme and cheese, toss together, and season to taste. If needed, adjust consistency with more pasta water. Serve immediately.

Per serving: 807 calories, 20 g protein, 72 g carbohydrate, 49 g fat (8 g saturated), 10 mg cholesterol, 236 mg sodium, 8 g fiber.