



Sugar Apple

Posts From The Caribbean

Spaghetti alle Vongole

If you have fresh clams (lucky you!), you'll need to scrub the shells with a brush and soak them in several changes of fresh water to remove any sand they may contain. And you should discard any fresh clams that don't close when you handle them. That means they're dead. None of this is necessary if you're starting with frozen clams, as I did.

According to the great Marcella Hazan, there is no need to discard the clams that don't open when you cook them. Those are apparently the freshest of the bunch. As Ms. Hazan points out, if you ate them raw on the half shell, how would you know which ones wouldn't have opened had they been cooked?

A lot of recipes call for removing the clams from the shells before tossing them with the pasta. But I like the look of the clam shells in the pasta so I leave them as they are. Plus I think it's more fun to eat them out of the shells.

2 pounds littleneck clams
4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil plus extra for serving
2 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced paper thin
1 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes
1/2 cup dry white wine
1 pound dried spaghetti
2 tablespoons fresh chopped parsley

Put the clams in a large pan wide enough to hold them so they aren't piled more than two deep (I use a large, fairly deep sauté pan). Cover the pan and put it on the stove over high heat. Cook the clams, turning them over or shaking the pan frequently. Remove the clams from the pan as they open and put them in a bowl. When all the clams have opened, drizzle them with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil, cover the bowl with plastic wrap and set it aside until ready to use. Pour the clam juice from the pan through a strainer into a small bowl (you should have about 1/3 to 1/2 cup of clam juice). You can do all this up to an hour in advance.

Put a large pot of water on to boil. Set a large skillet or sauté pan over medium heat (the pan needs to be large enough to eventually hold all the pasta, as well as the sauce). Add the remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil, garlic and red pepper flakes and cook for about 30 seconds. Don't let the garlic brown. Add the wine and cook for about a minute, then add the reserved clam juice. Cook for another minute and then turn off the heat under the skillet.

When the water boils, salt it generously and add the pasta. Cook the pasta until it's not quite al dente (it should be about a minute away from being fully cooked). Drain the pasta, reserving a little of the pasta water in a small cup. Turn the heat under the skillet on to high and add the pasta to the sauce in the skillet. Cook, tossing the pasta in the sauce until the juice has been absorbed into the pasta. This step is key - it allows the pasta to drink in the sauce so the flavors are absorbed fully into the pasta and not just hanging around on the outside.

Taste a strand of the pasta and if it's not fully cooked, add a little of the reserved pasta water. When the pasta is done, add the clams back in and toss just to warm the clams through. Turn off the heat, add the parsley and serve immediately, drizzling each portion with a touch of extra virgin olive oil. *Serves 6-8 as a first course or 4 as a main course.*

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from the article *Feast of the Seven Fishes* posted on January 8, 2010