

PASTA ALL'AMATRICIANA

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Serves 4 to 6.

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

To create an authentic-tasting version of Pasta All'Amatriciana we needed an alternative to hard-to-find guanciale, or cured pork jowl. Humble salt pork, though an unlikely solution, provided the rich, clean meatiness we were after. To ensure tender bites of pork throughout, we first simmered it in water to gently cook it and render fat, a step that allowed the meat to quickly turn golden once the water evaporated. Finally, to ensure the grated Pecorino Romano didn't clump in the hot sauce, we first mixed it with a little cooled rendered pork fat. Now the flavor of pork, tomato, chili flake, and Pecorino shine through in each bite.

Look for salt pork that is roughly 70 percent fat and 30 percent lean meat; leaner salt pork may not render enough fat. If it is difficult to slice, put the salt pork in the freezer for 15 minutes to firm up. Use high-quality imported Pecorino Romano—not the bland domestic cheese labeled “Romano.”

INGREDIENTS

- 8** ounces salt pork , rind removed, rinsed thoroughly, and patted dry
- 1/2** cup water
- 1/2** teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 2** tablespoons tomato paste
- 1/4** cup red wine
- 1** (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 2** ounces Pecorino Romano , finely grated (1 cup)
- 1** pound spaghetti
- 1** tablespoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** Slice pork into 1/4-inch-thick strips, then cut each strip crosswise into 1/4-inch pieces. Bring pork and water to simmer in 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat; cook until water evaporates and pork begins to sizzle, 5 to 8 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low and continue to cook, stirring frequently, until fat renders and pork turns golden, 5 to 8 minutes longer. Using slotted spoon, transfer pork to bowl. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from skillet. Reserve remaining fat.
- 2.** Return skillet to medium heat and add pepper flakes and tomato paste; cook, stirring constantly, for 20 seconds. Stir in wine and cook for 30 seconds. Stir in tomatoes and their juice and rendered pork and bring to simmer. Cook, stirring frequently, until thickened, 12 to 16 minutes. While sauce simmers, smear 2 tablespoons reserved fat and 1/2 cup Pecorino Romano together in bowl to form paste.
- 3.** Meanwhile, bring 4 quarts water to boil in large Dutch oven. Add spaghetti and salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve 1 cup cooking water, then drain spaghetti and return it to pot.
- 4.** Add sauce, 1/3 cup cooking water, and Pecorino Romano-fat mixture to pasta and toss well to coat, adjusting consistency with remaining cooking water as needed. Serve, passing remaining 1/2 cup Pecorino Romano separately.

Pork versus Pork

Guanciale, which is made by salting and drying hog jowls, is the traditional choice for this dish due to its intense pure-pork flavor. Looking for something equally porky but more readily available, we turn to salt pork, which is also salt-cured but is made from the belly.



GUANCIALE: Salted jowl.



SALT PORK: Salted belly.