

Three Filled Pastas

In one hour, you can make ravioli, tortelli, or tortellini by following these 16 step-by-step illustrations.



BY JACK BISHOP

Making pasta dough from scratch and then rolling, shaping, and stuffing it to produce ravioli, tortellini, and other varieties will never be quick. But stuffing pasta at home is simple, and the entire process — from making the pasta and filling to combining the two — can often be completed in about an hour. Best of all, the results put the frozen (and so-called “fresh”) filled pastas sold in supermarkets — with their lack of flavor and rubbery texture — to shame. Truly fresh pasta is incomparably better, with more tender texture and richer flavor.

There are only two essential ingredients for pasta dough: flour and eggs. I recommend all-purpose flour and a ratio of two-thirds cup flour to one large egg. This yields a dough that is elastic and strong enough to roll and manipulate, is not sticky, and is wonderfully tender after cooking. Slight variations in egg size or in heat and humidity can affect results, but after making pasta once or twice you’ll know whether it is too wet or dry.

Pasta making is greatly speeded up by using modern cooking tools. I use a food processor to combine ingredients and to knead the dough, and a manual pasta machine — the Atlas brand is by far the most common — to roll it out.

Once the pasta is made, you can fill it with al-

most any combination of ground meats, vegetables, cheeses, herbs, and/or spices, and you should feel free to invent your own stuffings. Just make sure that the mixture is thick, not runny; that you use egg yolk as a binder; and that you season it generously so that it contrasts with the bland pasta.

When filling pasta, resist the temptation to overload it with filling. Bulging ravioli are difficult to seal and may break when cooked. A fluted pastry wheel is best for cutting ravioli and twisted tortelli; use a pizza wheel for cutting out squares for tortellini, and seal it with your fingers. A handy device called the KrimpKut Sealer (*see Sources and Resources, page 32*) does an excellent job of sealing and scalloping the edges of ravioli in one motion.

For illustrated instructions on making several filled pasta shapes, see pages 16 and 17. One word of advice — don’t worry if your filled pastas are slightly irregular; it will only add to their homemade appeal.

MASTER RECIPE FOR PASTA DOUGH

Makes about 1 pound fresh pasta

Individual recipes give yields in terms of pieces of stuffed pasta, but all three variations produce enough pasta to feed six as a main course and eight or even ten as a first course. To freeze

the stuffed pastas, place them on a lightly floured cookie sheet and freeze. Transfer frozen pastas to zipper-lock bags and return to freezer. Make sure to add at least three minutes to the cooking time when cooking frozen pastas.

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 large eggs, beaten

1. Pulse flour in workbowl of a food processor fitted with the metal blade to evenly distribute. Add eggs; process until dough forms a rough ball, about 30 seconds. (If dough resembles small pebbles, add water, ½ teaspoon at a time; if dough sticks to side of workbowl, add flour, 1 tablespoon at a time, and process until dough forms a rough ball.)

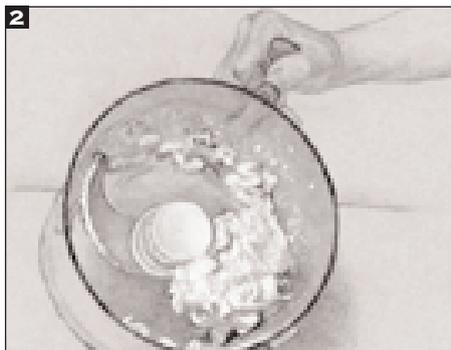
2. Turn dough ball and small bits out onto a dry work surface; knead until dough is smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside (*see steps 1 through 3, below*).

3. Cut about ¼ of dough from ball and flatten into a disk; rewrap remaining dough. Run dough through widest setting of a manual pasta machine. Bring ends of dough towards the middle and press down to seal. Run dough, open end first, through the widest setting again. Fold, seal, and roll again. Without folding, run pasta through widest setting about two more

KNEADING DOUGH IN A FOOD PROCESSOR



1. If after 30 seconds the dough resembles small pebbles, it is too dry. With motor running, add one-half teaspoon of water. Repeat one more time if necessary.



2. If dough sticks to the sides of the workbowl, it is too wet. Add one tablespoon flour at a time until dough is no longer tacky.



3. Dough that is of proper moistness will come together in one large mass. If there are some small bits that remain unincorporated, turn contents of workbowl onto a board and knead together.

times, until dough is smooth. If at any point dough is sticky, lightly dust with flour. Continue to run dough through machine; narrow the setting each time, until you use last setting on machine, and outline of your hand is visible through dough sheet (see steps 1A through 1E, right).

4. Follow instructions below for cutting and shaping each pasta. After one sheet of pasta has been cut, stuffed, and set aside, roll out another quarter of the dough ball, along with trimmings from previous sheet.

TWISTED TORTELLI

Makes about 36

Many Americans are not familiar with this pasta from northern Italy. The shape is extremely easy to prepare and takes little time to execute; it's twisted form resembles candy wrappers.

- 1 pound fresh pasta sheets
- 1 filling recipe
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 sauce recipe

1. Follow steps 4A through 4C, page 17, to form tortelli.

2. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in a large stockpot. Add salt and half the pasta. Cook until twisted ends are *al dente*, about 6 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer tortelli to warmed bowls or plates; add sauce. Meanwhile, put remaining tortelli in boiling water and repeat cooking process. (Or bring two pots of water to boil and cook both batches simultaneously.) Serve immediately.

RAVIOLI

Makes about 60

This recipe produces two-inch square ravioli with three fluted edges and one folded edge. The folded edge may be trimmed with a fluted pastry wheel if you like.

- 1 pound fresh pasta sheets
- 1 filling recipe
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 sauce recipe

1. Follow steps 2A through 2D, page 17, to form ravioli.

2. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in a large stockpot. Add salt and half the pasta. Cook until doubled edges are *al dente*, 4 to 5 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer ravioli to warmed bowls or plates; add sauce. Meanwhile, put remaining ravioli in boiling water and repeat cooking process. (Or bring two pots of water to boil and cook both batches simultaneously.) Serve immediately.

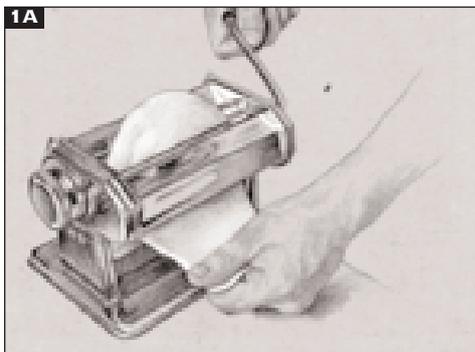
TORTELLINI

Makes about 90

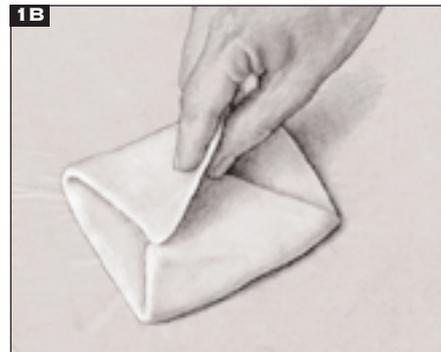
Tortellini's rounded shape is more labor intensive than either ravioli or tortelli, making it a good choice when there are several people

Shaping Filled Pastas

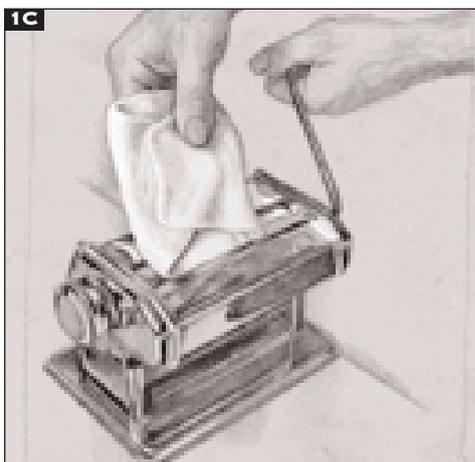
ROLLING OUT PASTA WITH A MANUAL MACHINE



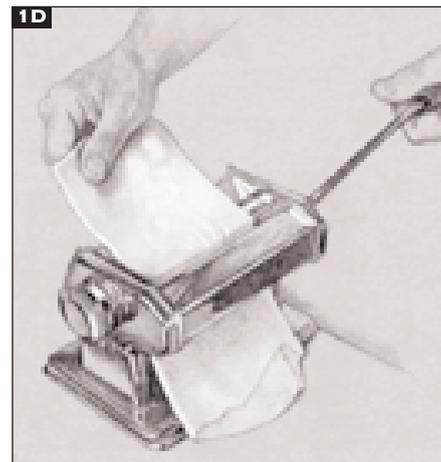
1A. Cut about one-quarter of dough from ball and flatten into a disk. Run disk through rollers set to widest position (setting one on the Atlas machine).



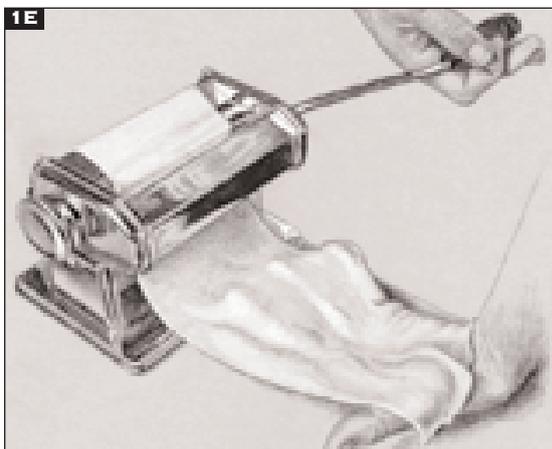
1B. Bring ends of the dough towards the middle and press down to seal.



1C. Feed open end of pasta through the rollers. Repeat steps 1B and 1C.



1D. Without folding again, run pasta through widest setting twice or until dough is smooth. If dough is at all sticky, lightly dust it with flour.



1E. Begin to roll pasta thinner by putting it through the machine repeatedly, narrowing the setting each time. Roll until dough is thin and satiny (setting seven on the Atlas machine), dusting with flour if sticky. You should be able to see the outline of your hand through the pasta.

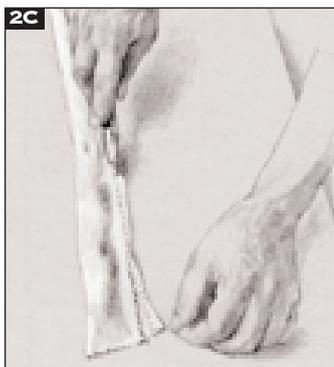
MAKING RAVIOLI



2A. Use a pizza wheel or sharp knife to cut sheets into long rectangles measuring four inches across. Place small balls of filling (about one rounded teaspoon each) in a line one inch from the bottom of the pasta sheet. Leave one and one-quarter inches between each ball of filling.



2B. Fold over the top of the pasta and line it up with the bottom edge. Seal bottom and the two open sides with your finger.



2C. Use fluted pastry wheel to cut along the two sides and bottom of the sealed pasta sheet.



2D. Run pastry wheel between balls of filling to cut out the ravioli.

MAKING TORTELLINI



3A. Use a pizza wheel or sharp knife to cut pasta sheet into two and one-half-inch squares. Lift one square from work surface (otherwise it may stick when stuffed) and place it on another clean part of the counter. Place one-half teaspoon filling in the center of square.



3B. Fold square diagonally in half to make two triangles. Make sure that the top piece of dough covers the filling but leaves a thin border of the bottom triangle exposed. Seal edges with finger.



3C. Lift filled triangle from counter and wrap the back of the triangle around the top of your index finger. Squeeze the two bottom corners of the triangle together.



3D. As you pull back the top peak of the triangle, gently fold over the top ring of pasta so that the stuffing is completely enclosed. Slide the filled pasta off your finger.

MAKING TWISTED TORTELLI



4A. Use a fluted pastry wheel to cut pasta sheet into rectangles measuring four-by-five inches. Lift one rectangle from work surface (otherwise it may stick when stuffed) and place it on another clean part of the counter. Place a rounded tablespoon of filling in the center of rectangle.



4B. With a long side facing you, fold the bottom third of the rectangle over the filling. Next, fold the top third over the filling so that it just barely overlaps with the folded piece from the bottom.



4C. Place hands at either end of the pasta and twist in opposite directions to form candy-wrapper shape.

working in the kitchen. This recipe produces relatively large tortellini; to make tortellini for soup, cut pasta into one and one-half- or two-inch squares.

- 1 pound fresh pasta sheets
- ½ filling recipe
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 sauce recipe

1. Follow steps 3A through 3D, page 17, to form tortellini.

2. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in a large stockpot. Add salt and half the pasta. Cook until tortellini are *al dente*, about 4 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer tortellini directly to warm bowls or plates; add sauce. Meanwhile, put remaining tortellini in boiling water and repeat cooking process. (Or bring two pots of water to boil and cook both batches simultaneously.) Serve immediately.

SPINACH AND RICOTTA FILLING FOR PASTA

Makes about 2½ cups

This filling works well with either the tomato or brown butter sauce (*see* recipes, below). Other leafy vegetables such as kale and Swiss chard may be substituted for the spinach. Three-quarter cups frozen chopped spinach may be used if desired; defrost spinach and squeeze out excess liquid before cooking it with the onions.

- ¾ pound fresh spinach leaves, stemmed and washed
- 2 tablespoons butter
- ½ small onion, minced (about ¼ cup)
- Salt
- 1 cup ricotta
- ¾ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 egg yolk

1. Place cleaned spinach leaves and any water that clings to them in a nonreactive soup kettle. Cover and cook over medium heat until spinach wilts, about 5 minutes. Cool spinach slightly, squeeze out the excess liquid, and chop fine; set aside.

2. Heat butter in a small skillet. Add onions and sauté until translucent, about 5 minutes. Stir in chopped spinach and salt to taste; cook for 1 minute.

3. Transfer spinach mixture to a medium bowl. Stir in remaining ingredients; adjust seasonings, and set aside. (Can be covered and refrigerated overnight.)

SQUASH, PROSCIUTTO, AND PARMESAN FILLING FOR PASTA

Makes about 2½ cups

Fresh sage perfumes this autumnal stuffing that is best paired with the brown butter sauce (*see* below). Other hard squash or pumpkin also work well in this filling. You can also substitute frozen pureed squash for the fresh squash. Two 12-ounce packages of frozen squash

cooked over medium heat for 10 minutes (to thicken the squash puree) yields about two cups, more than the one and one-half cups you'll need in this recipe.

- 2 small acorn squash (about 1½ pounds), halved and seeded
- ¼ pound prosciutto, minced fine
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh sage leaves
- ⅛ teaspoon grated nutmeg
- Salt to taste

1. Heat oven to 400 degrees. Place squash, cut sides down, on a small baking sheet; bake until tender, about 35 minutes. Cool squash, then scoop out the flesh (about 1½ cups).

2. Mix squash with remaining ingredients; set aside. (Can be covered and refrigerated overnight.)

MEAT AND RICOTTA FILLING WITH BASIL FOR PASTA

Makes about 2½ cups

This filling is especially delicious with beef, veal, or pork. Use any combination of these meats and pair this hearty filling with tomato sauce (*see* below).

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ pound ground meat
- 1 cup ricotta
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 egg yolk
- ¼ cup minced fresh basil leaves
- Salt and ground black pepper

Heat oil in a medium skillet. Add garlic and sauté until lightly colored, about 1 minute. Add meat; cook over medium-high heat, stirring to break up larger pieces, until liquid evaporates and meat browns, 3 to 4 minutes. Drain off fat; transfer meat mixture to a medium bowl. Stir in remaining ingredients and set filling aside. (Can be covered and refrigerated overnight.)

WILD MUSHROOM FILLING FOR PASTA

Makes about 2½ cups

This earthy filling can be served with either sauce. Reserve the porcini soaking liquid for soups or rice dishes.

- 1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 10 ounces fresh wild or domestic mushrooms, cleaned and minced
- ¼ cup minced fresh parsley leaves
- Salt and ground black pepper
- 1 cup ricotta
- ⅓ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 egg yolk

1. Cover porcini with boiling water and soak 30 minutes. Drain and reserve liquid for another use. Mince porcini and set aside.

2. Heat oil in a medium skillet. Add garlic and sauté over medium heat until golden, about 2 minutes. Add fresh mushrooms and cook until wilted, about 4 minutes. Stir in porcini, parsley, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook until liquid evaporates, about 2 minutes.

3. Off heat, stir in remaining ingredients and adjust seasonings; set aside. (Filling can be covered and refrigerated overnight.)

GARDEN TOMATO SAUCE

Makes about 2½ cups

Carrots and onions give this sauce a sweetness that contrasts nicely with either the spinach or meat fillings.

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 small onion, minced
- 1 medium carrot, peeled and minced
- 1 can (28 ounces) crushed tomatoes
- Salt

Melt butter in a medium saucepan. Add onion and carrots; cook over medium heat until vegetables soften, but do not brown, about 5 minutes. Add tomatoes and ½ teaspoon salt; bring to boil; simmer until sauce thickens, about 1 hour. Adjust seasonings.

For a chunky, more rustic sauce, stir in 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley or basil leaves. Toss with pasta and serve with grated Parmesan cheese.

For a smooth, more refined sauce, puree mixture in a food processor or blender. Return pureed sauce to pan and stir in ½ cup heavy cream. Cook, stirring constantly, until sauce starts to bubble and thicken, 1 to 2 minutes. Toss with pasta and serve with grated Parmesan cheese.

BROWN BUTTER AND PINE NUT SAUCE

Makes about 1 cup

This simple, elegant sauce is the perfect match for the squash filling; it also works quite nicely with spinach-filled pasta.

- ½ cup pine nuts
- ¼ pound butter
- Salt
- ¼ cup minced fresh parsley leaves

1. Heat oven to 325 degrees. Toast nuts on a small baking sheet until golden, about 5 minutes; set aside.

2. Melt butter in a medium skillet; cook over medium heat, swirling pan, until butter turns golden brown, about 5 minutes. Stir in reserved nuts, ½ teaspoon salt, and parsley. Toss with pasta and serve with grated Parmesan cheese. ■