

Quality of pasta

The qualitative factors of Pasta can be briefly summarised in 5 points:

- The type of place of origin of the durum wheat from which the flour is produced.
- The characteristics of the flour.
- The manufacturing processes of kneading, drawing and drying.
- Possible added ingredients.
- The hygiene of preservation.

Italy, the originator of pasta, is very strict about its production procedure and follows stringent methods. The law n. 580 of 04/07/67 clearly states that and use of common wheat flour in place of durum wheat flour in pasta is a fraudulent act. So, manufacturing of pasta, especially dry pasta, with common wheat is considered to be against law. The standard measure for pasta mixture is flour with 30% water. To maintain the protein structure and tightness of the dough, the flour must contain particles of uniform dimensions. While too small particles will make the dough soggy, the bigger ones will absorb too much water that disturbs the homogeneity of the dough.

When raw, good quality dry pasta must have the following characteristics:

- it must have a uniformly smooth appearance and texture;
- no spots or dark shades must be visible when light shines through it;
- it must have a clear and unmistakable amber yellow colour;
- it must be odourless;
- it must taste slightly sweet;
- when broken it must make a dry sound and the fracture must appear smooth and glassy with no air bubbles.

Starch defines the component of carbohydrate found at 60-70% in the wheat grain. In raw pasta, starch is found in the granules. On the other hand, the gluten is a viscous substance resembling the Latin gluten = glue. These are not really wheat-based components but it is formed through the interaction of two proteins, gliadin and glutelin when these are hydrated. These appear in dough of pasta when water is added to the flour and kneaded thoroughly. This gluten blend with granules of starch and form a consistent and regular arrangement. While cooking, these two ingredients play completely different roles. The starch granule absorbs water and rapidly swells up until it breaks and frees its content in the water; the two gluten proteins on the other hand coagulate forming a very compact lattice that envelopes the starch granules and tries to hold them as much as it can. These two contrasting transforming behaviours take place under same temperature. While the starch tends to absorb water, swelling till it breaks, the protein grid that, coagulating, tries to stop the complete dispersion of the starch. In poorly prepared pasta, the starch out balances the protein element and the pasta turns out to be a rigid piece of wheat with whitish water. A pasta that is prepared with well balance of the elements is a soft and spongy one as the gluten has managed to stop the starch from absorbing water. Thus the internal balance, nutritional value and taste of pasta are preserved.

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