

01

Recipe number one

We start with a pasta recipe that always reminds me of the three loveliest things about the Maremma: the vongole of the sea, the chickpeas of Tuscan tradition and the courgettes of my beloved vegetable garden.

Mezze penne con vongole, ceci e zucchini

Short penne with clams, chickpeas and courgettes

Ingredients for 4 people

Courgettes and clams can be prepared in advance:

600g clams/vongole wash several times and leave them briefly in cold water

400g courgettes cut into fine batons, sweat until half done and season

1 garlic clove, chopped

3 tbsp olive oil

heat a wide frying pan

1 garlic clove, chopped olive oil, garlic and clams into the pan

3 tbsp olive oil

a dash of white wine deglaze and cook covered over a high flame until, after a few minutes, the clams have opened; then take off the heat,

Pepper and peperoncino season, taste the juices, add salt if needed

350g penne (better suited than spaghetti) cook in salted water

200g cooked chickpeas frozen or tinned (rinsed), add to the boiling penne

Drain penne and chickpeas 3 minutes before the usual cooking time and return them to the pan

3 tbsp olive oil fold in, then add the clams with their juices and the courgettes, cover and leave to stand for a moment, season again if needed

1 bunch of parsley, chopped fold in before serving.

When seasoning: it really should have a bit of a kick!

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MY PASTA TRICK

I always set aside a little of the pasta cooking water. If the mixture then looks a bit dry, I can loosen the whole thing with water instead of oil. That makes the dish juicy and lighter.

MY CHICKPEA TRICK

Chickpeas have to be soaked overnight and cooked for about 3 hours. I usually prepare a large batch and freeze them loose. Bagged up they are always to hand – for a quick salad, for instance: just let them thaw in boiling water, drain them and toss them lukewarm with the sauce.