

ALISON ROMAN'S CREAMY CAULIFLOWER PASTA WITH PECORINO BREADCRUMBS



Serves 4

Ingredients

- 6 tbsps olive oil
- 60g fresh, coarse or panko breadcrumbs
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 30g finely grated pecorino cheese, plus more to serve
- 225g dried rigatoni, ziti or campanelle
- 1 large shallot, finely chopped
- 1 medium head cauliflower, sliced about 1cm thick (I like to include the leaves and stem, but that is optional)
- 250ml double (heavy) cream
- 1 tbsp finely grated lemon zest, plus more to serve
- 25g finely chopped chives
- Chilli flakes (optional)

Serve with

Like all heavier, creamier pastas, this is especially nice with a brightly dressed leafy, herby salad.

“This recipe is wonderful for many reasons: A whole head of cauliflower caramelises in a skillet before being simmered with cream, black pepper, pecorino cheese and a bit of lemon zest, breaking down into a special (and yes, decadent) sauce to coat the pasta shape of your choosing. It’s all very dreamy. But really, it’s the pecorino breadcrumbs we’re here for, and that’s okay – they’re magnificent. A crunchy, oily, salty vehicle for more cheese and much-needed texture, they’re the ideal finish to a saucy pasta such as this, but don’t stop there. Use them as tiny croutons to finish a Caesar salad or scatter them over the top of a pot of saucy beans. Once they’re in your life, you’ll never want to be without them.”

Method

1. Heat 3 tablespoons of the olive oil in a large skillet over a medium heat. Add the breadcrumbs and season with salt and pepper. Stir to coat evenly in the oil and cook, tossing occasionally, until they’re evenly toasted and golden brown, for about 4–6 minutes.
2. Add half of the pecorino and toss to coat, letting the cheese melt and clump among the breadcrumbs (think granola-like clusters). Remove from the heat and transfer to a small bowl or plate; set aside.
3. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to the boil. Cook the pasta until al dente; save about 250ml of pasta water, then drain.
4. Wipe out any crumbs from the skillet and heat the remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil over a medium heat. Add the shallot and cauliflower and season with salt and plenty of pepper. Cook, tossing occasionally, until the cauliflower has completely softened and both the cauliflower and shallots are beginning to caramelize and brown, 12–15 minutes.
5. Add the cream and lemon zest and bring to a simmer, then let the cream reduce and thicken, 2–4 minutes. Season with salt and plenty of pepper.
6. Add the pasta to the cauliflower along with the remaining pecorino and 175ml of the pasta water. Cook, tossing to coat the pasta and thicken the sauce, until it’s thick and glossy and almost resembles macaroni and cheese, adding more pasta water by the tablespoon as needed, 4–6 minutes.
7. Remove from the heat. Divide the pasta among bowls and top with pecorino breadcrumbs, chives, more lemon zest, chilli flakes (if using) and more cheese if you like.