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RECIPES FOR HEALTH

Baked Orzo With Tomatoes, Roasted Peppers and Zucchini

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Orzo is a type of pasta that looks like rice. It's popular in Greece, where it is baked in casseroles like this one. If you like comforting dishes like macaroni and cheese, you'll like this.

1/2 pound orzo (about 1 1/8 cups)

Salt to taste

1 large red pepper, roasted and diced

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

2 medium zucchini, sliced about 1/4 inch thick

Freshly ground pepper to taste

1 pound tomatoes, peeled, seeded and diced; or 1 14-ounce can diced tomatoes, with juice

1 or 2 plump garlic cloves (to taste), minced

2 ounces freshly grated Parmesan or 2 ounces crumbled goat cheese (1/2 cup, tightly packed)

1. Bring a large pot of generously salted water to a boil, and add the orzo. Cook eight minutes, or until it is cooked through but still firm to the bite. Drain and transfer to a large bowl. Toss with the diced roasted pepper and 1 tablespoon of the olive oil.
2. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Oil a 2-quart baking dish. Heat another tablespoon of olive oil over medium-high heat in a large, wide skillet. Add the zucchini and cook — stirring and turning over the slices, or tossing them in the pan — until just cooked through and lightly colored, about five minutes. Scrape into the bowl with the orzo.
3. Return the pan to the heat, add the final tablespoon of oil and the garlic. Cook just until fragrant, 20 to 30 seconds, and add the tomatoes and salt to taste. Cook, stirring from time to time, until the tomatoes have cooked down slightly and smell fragrant. Taste and adjust seasoning. Scrape into the bowl with the orzo, add the Parmesan or goat cheese, and mix everything together. Add freshly ground pepper to taste, and adjust salt. Transfer to the baking dish.
4. Bake 30 to 40 minutes, until the top is just beginning to color. Serve hot or warm.

Other Factors That Affect Processing Times

In addition to the effect of acidity, process times also depend on:

- Altitude.
- Style of food being canned— whole, halves, crushed, etc.
- Whether jars are raw-packed or hot-packed.
- Size of jar.
- Whether jars are processed in a boiling water canner or a pressure canner.
- Thickness of food.

Thin juice heats more quickly than thick juice. However, all juices heat more quickly than fruit pieces or sauces. Whole or halved tomatoes heat more quickly when packed in water than in thick juice or without liquid.

Canning strained products is *not recommended* because it is extremely difficult to achieve a safe internal temperature due to the thickness of strained products.

Many soups are combinations of food pieces and broths. Heating is slower when food pieces are larger or they are higher in numbers per jar. Starch also slows the heating, which is why cream-style corn requires more processing time than whole-kernel corn that is packed in water.

All **approved process times** have been scientifically determined by laboratory research and offer adequate safeguards against all variables in properly executed home-canning practices.

Proper Canning Practices

Check USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning or Extension bulletins to determine the elevation adjustments needed for the food to be canned at your elevation.

1. Carefully select good quality food. Sort to remove diseased and moldy fruit and vegetables, which will reduce the number of microorganisms in the food.
2. Wash, peel and cut into uniformly sized pieces, if appropriate.
3. If hot packing, heat and boil for one to five minutes. This will kill most microorganisms, destroy enzymes, and drive out air.
4. Fill immediately into hot jars, leaving the appropriate headspace. (If processing time is less than 10 minutes, sterilize jars before filling with food.)
5. Add acids (vinegar, bottled lemon juice, bottled lime juice or citric acid) to some foods. Acid can be added before filling jars.
6. Wipe rims with a clean cloth.
7. Apply self-sealing lids (flats) following manufacturer's directions and finger-tighten screw bands, which hold the lids in place until they seal.
8. Process jars for the recommended time in a boiling water canner or pressure canner, making altitude adjustments as necessary.
9. Remove from canner using a jar lifter for safety reasons.
10. Place on a towel with adequate space around jar to cool properly— 12 to 24 hours to form vacuum seals.
11. Remove screw bands, wash, label, and store sealed jars.

Collectively, these practices remove oxygen, destroy enzymes, prevent the growth of undesirable bacteria, yeast, and molds, and help form a high vacuum in jars. Good vacuums form tight seals that keep liquid in and air and microorganisms out.

When there are concerns about whether the food is safe to eat, review the information and checklist on page 41 of this lesson.

SALSA RECIPE FOR CANNING

MILD SALSA makes 7 – 8 pints

10 cups peeled, finely chopped tomatoes OR **10 cups roasted tomato puree***

2 cups sweet pepper, finely chopped

2/3 cup mild chilies, finely chopped

2 cups onion, finely chopped

2 Tablespoons minced garlic

1 cup cider vinegar (at least 5% acidity)

2 Tablespoons cilantro, chopped

2 teaspoons salt

4 teaspoons ground cumin

2 teaspoons dried oregano

2 teaspoons Tabasco sauce

Note: you can use any kind of pepper, just do not exceed 2 2/3 cups total.

Combine all ingredients, bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 5 minutes. Fill hot jars, leaving 1/2 headspace. Attach lids and process for 15 minutes in a boiling water bath. (1001 – 6000 feet process 20 minutes; above 6000 feet, process 25 minutes) For an added degree of safety, in case you are using sweeter, low acid tomatoes, you can add 1/4 teaspoon citric acid per pint, or 1/2 teaspoon per quart.

***To roast tomatoes: Preheat oven to 400*, cut tomatoes in half, place cut side down in a jelly roll or roasting pan. Drizzle with olive oil. Roast until golden and juice has evaporated. Depending on the variety of tomatoes this may take anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour. At this point, you can pluck off the skins, or puree in a food processor, or run the tomatoes through a food mill. If the mixture is still too runny for salsa, cook down in a crock pot to the desired consistency.**

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