

Orecchiette con Cime di Rapa

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb. orecchiette (little ear-shaped pasta)
- 1 or 2 bunches broccoli rabe (rapini), washed, roughly cut in 2-inch chunks•
- 1 or 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 to 6 anchovy fillets
- Good pinch red pepper flake
- 2 T olive oil
- Optional: fine bread crumbs
- Salt to taste

•Rabe cooks down tremendously. You may need to add it in stages and wait till some of it cooks down.

This dish is native to the region in Italy called Puglia. Don't be afraid of the anchovies. You won't taste fishiness and, to leave them out, would mean a loss of complexity in the dish.



Handmade orecchiette is fun to make but you can find it in a good grocery store.

1. Put a big pot of water on boil with plenty of salt.
2. Lay the whole bunch of rapini on a cutting board and roughly chop into 2-inch (or so) sections—using the greens, stems and buds. It will seem like a lot but it cooks down. Rinse and drain the greens, leaving a bit of water on the leaves (for steaming during saute).
3. In a big skillet, heat the oil and saute the garlic, anchovies and red pepper. Don't let the garlic burn. Using a wooden spoon, smash up the anchovies till they melt. At the same time, add the pasta to the rapidly boiling water (both the pasta and the rapini take about 10 minutes, so you can do them at the same time).
4. Add the rapini to the skillet and saute over medium heat. You may need to allow some to wilt before adding the rest. Add a little salt (not so much because the anchovies have salt, as does the pasta water). Cook the rapini till the stems are just tender, but not overcooked.
5. Halfway through the pasta cooking, scoop out about 1/2 cup of the pasta water and set aside. Cook till just tender, or al dente, and drain.
6. Add the pasta to the skillet with the rapini, stirring to combine well. Add some of the reserved pasta water, the starch of which combines with the olive oil to create a sauce. Add salt if necessary.
7. Serve sprinkled with some fine breadcrumbs. This dish is excellent with a Primitivo or Salice Salentino (both hearty reds from Puglia).

Note: You can try boiling rapini first and then sauteing, but I find that sauteing alone is sufficient and the rapini is less soggy (the stems of rapini are less woody than some of the other raves). Some recipes call for sausage, and some call for parmigiano (a little odd since Italians don't normally mix cheese with fish). In other words, look for other recipes and experiment. It might seem strange to serve with a hearty red but the dish is hearty, and Puglia is not known for its white wines. An inexpensive Salice Salentino is available at Trader Joes.

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