



Tortelloni Alla Panna with Shrimp

Serves 4 people (one-cup servings of pasta plus added ingredients and sauce)

Ingredients:

1 package fresh cheese-stuffed tortelloni from the refrigerated pasta section of your grocery store or market.

(Our current favorite brand is Rana Pasta)

1 lb extra-large shrimp (21-25 count per pound), peeled and deveined. Rinse and reserve the shells. Cut the shrimp into thick chunks and refrigerate until ready to use.

1 carrot, peeled and ¼ inch diced

1 small onion, ¼ inch diced

1 stalk of celery, ¼ inch diced

3 large cloves garlic, smashed and minced, divided 2-1

1 bay leaf

1/2 tsp dried or 1 TB fresh thyme, split 1-1

½ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf (Italian) parsley

1 tsp tomato paste

4 TB butter divided 1-1

2 TB neutral oil or good fruity olive oil split 1-1

2 TB brandy

½ cup plus 2 TB dry white vermouth or good dry white wine, divided

4 cups of water

A pinch of dried red pepper flakes

Coarsely ground kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

12 oz fresh mushrooms, thickly sliced (use cultivated white, Baby Bellas, or a nice mix)

¼ cup finely diced shallot

½ to ¾ cup heavy cream, more if needed

Freshly grated good quality Parmesan or Romano cheese (we prefer Locatelli or Grana Padana)

1 cup tiny green peas, fresh or frozen. Thaw frozen peas in warm water, drain and pat dry.

¼ cup finely chopped, or sliced and cut into slivers, good quality prosciutto ham

Additional garnish if you desire: 3 TB of toasted pine nuts

Method:

1. Make the shrimp stock: (You may prepare the stock the day before):
 - Melt 2 TB butter with 1 TB oil in a wide-bottomed saucepan. Add the bay leaf, half the thyme, and red pepper flakes and cook over low heat to hydrate the spices. S&P lightly.
 - Add the carrots, celery, onion, and one TB of minced garlic and cook low and slow until vegetables are beginning to soften. Do not brown.
 - Add shrimp shells and turn heat to medium. Stir and toss shells until they turn pink. Stir in tomato paste.
 - Add brandy, and light on fire. Shake the pan and cook until flames go out.

- Add 1/2 cup of dry vermouth and reduce by half. Add water and bring to a boil. Turn down to a simmer.
 - Cover the pan partially with a lid and simmer for 30-40 minutes. Stir every ten minutes and reduce by at least 1/2. Taste the stock to make sure it has a briny shrimp flavor. You should have 1 ½ to 2 cups of stock when finished. Strain into a clean jar or container and set aside or refrigerate until you are ready to cook and assemble the pasta dish.
2. Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and place pasta on top of a clean dish towel laid on a sheet pan to cool and dry. Separate the tortelloni, so they do not stick to each other as they dry. If you want to do this a day in advance, place damp paper towels on top of the pasta, wrap the sheet pan in plastic, and refrigerate until ready to make the sauce.
 3. To make the sauce and complete the dish:
 - In a large heavy-bottomed sauté pan (10-12 inches across), melt 1 TB butter with 1TB oil over low heat. Add ½ the remaining garlic and stir, cooking until translucent BUT NOT BROWN. Add the shrimp, season with S&P, and cook until shrimp have lost their transparency but are not cooked through. Remove shrimp to a rimmed plate or flat bowl to cool. You want to retain any juices with the shrimp.
 - Place pan back on the heat and melt the remaining butter with the last of the oil. Add the shallots and cook over low heat until shallots are translucent and soft, but not brown. Add the garlic and the remaining thyme and cook for 30 seconds until it is fragrant. Again, do not brown. Add the mushrooms and the prosciutto to the pan and turn heat up to medium. Stir and toss the mushrooms until they begin to release their juices. Be careful not to brown the ham or shallots.
 - Add the remaining dry vermouth, turn up the heat, and deglaze the pan, coating the mushrooms well. Reduce until it is syrupy. Season with salt and pepper. Remember that the shrimp has already been seasoned, and the grated cheese added at the end will ratchet up the salt quotient.
 - Add 1 cup of the shrimp stock, lower the heat, and reduce by half. Raise temperature to medium, add the heavy cream, and bring to a low boil. Turn down to a simmer and reduce until the sauce begins to thicken. Add more cream and more shrimp stock if the sauce does not seem sufficient.
 - Add the pasta and the peas and heat through.
 - Add the parsley, the shrimp, and their juices. Simmer until shrimp cook through, and peas are tender, but not mushy. Just a minute or two. Toss ¼ cup of the grated cheese with the pasta and sauce. Serve in low, flat bowls. Garnish with additional grated cheese and toasted pine nuts if you wish.

A simple green salad or steamed vegetable would be the perfect accompaniment. Our latest favorite homemade vinaigrette is made with the excellent Late Harvest Zinfandel wine vinegar from Katz Family in Napa Valley, California.

No-Recipe Recipe ideas:

I know the shrimp stock sounds like a lot of work for a simple pasta in cream sauce. If you cook shrimp either fresh or frozen, always buy shrimp in the shell. Stockpile the shells in your freezer by wrapping what you save in plastic wrap. Seal the packets in a double layer of food storage bags in your freezer. Make a big batch of stock on a rainy afternoon and freeze it in smaller containers for individual meal use. You will not be sorry.

Use this versatile stock in place of chicken broth in a seafood risotto. My go-to quick-but-special risotto is to use orzo in place of the rice—same ladle by ladle preparation. You will need about 5 cups of stock for 2 cups of orzo. And wine, of course.

Use shrimp stock in She Crab Soup (I prefer Charleston Style over Chesapeake Bay preparation), Shrimp Gumbo, Shrimp Bisque, Lobster-sauce-anything, in place of some of the cream in Lobster-Mac 'n Cheese, Shrimp or Scallops Newburg, and on and on. You can use this preparation with chicken stock and chicken—with pasta or without. Use tri-colored tortellini or ravioli for the pasta.

Oven-roasted cherry tomatoes give the sauce a deeper flavor. Shower it with a chiffonade of fresh basil for an herby punch at the end. Substitute Italian sausage or pancetta or chorizo in place of the prosciutto.

Keep me posted on your discoveries!