



Primavera

IT'S ALL IN THE NAME

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PRIMAVERA. IN ITALIAN and other romance languages, “primavera” refers to Spring. In cooking, primavera conjures up spring vegetables, fresh and crisp.

Spring. The miraculous season, that every year catches us with that first warm day when we can feel and even smell the earth coming to life. This year, especially, it felt like spring was waiting in the wings for an awfully long time, ready to take her bow. March 20. She was due to arrive. The night before, the moon was impossibly full and bright. Certainly, that portended a momentous debut. But the first day of spring was chilly and drizzly. I had a doctor’s appointment that I was rushing to make on time. My head was down, bucking the wind. And suddenly I stopped dead in my tracks, causing the person behind me to utter a most unkind expletive. But there, fighting the obstacles of wind, rain, and pedestrians, was a purple crocus. It always gets me. POW! The delicate stem, the fragile petals...the strength and determination of that flower to tell us that indeed, spring is on its way.

I’ve got to say, as far as food goes, I’m good and ready for spring. I enjoyed the braises of winter and ate squashes and potatoes. Soft foods. Comforting soups. When winter citrus hit the shelves, I welcomed their bright, acidic tastes. But now I craved something crisp, something green and grassy. Asparagus, fava beans, baby artichokes, and peas all beckoned. I was their supplicant, combing through my recipes, wanting to use as much as I could of their crisp textures. Often, I ate them raw, reveling in the freshness and crunch of their pristine “green-ness”. I picked up bunches of spring vegetables at the market, then thought, now what? I didn’t want to mess around too much; these babies would be great simply steamed or roasted.

But, I have way too many noodles in my cupboard. Pasta in every shape and size. Why not Pasta Primavera? That was the dish I made for company when we first moved to Barrington in 1972. Holy cow...47 years ago!

Herbert Hoover might have promised “A Chicken in Every Pot”, but he didn’t promise a microwave in every kitchen. We didn’t zap vegetables; we drowned them! For that first time, I bought frozen vegetables and boiled the life out of them, following the directions on the wrapper. They didn’t resemble the picture on the front of the package, being slightly gray of color. But I soldiered on. I cooked spaghetti until it was nice and soft. Al dente wasn’t part of my vocabulary. Luckily, I can’t remember what made the sauce white and creamy. At the time, restaurants were serving similar styles. Pasta Primavera was ubiquitous on every Italian menu. It became so common, that it soon fell out of favor...until now.

With our farmers’ markets and produce shelves filled with just-picked baby vegetables, primavera takes on its beautiful original meaning. This month, I again made it for what I used to call company. Now I just say friends. ☺

Pasta Primavera

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 ounces small multicolored carrots
- ¼ pound sugar snap peas, trimmed
- ¾ pound fresh asparagus, ends snapped
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ¾ cup fresh English peas (or frozen peas, if fresh aren't available)
- ¼ cup thinly sliced scallion, white part only
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- ½ teaspoon fine sea salt, more as needed
- 12 ounces tagliatelle or fettuccine, preferably durum wheat rather than egg pasta
- ½ cup crème fraîche or whole milk Greek yogurt, room temperature
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmigiana-Reggiano cheese, grated on a microplane
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon
- 1 cup fresh pea shoots, for garnish
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley, for garnish

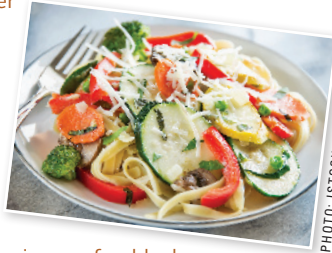


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INSTRUCTIONS

1. Bring a large pot of heavily salted water to a boil over medium-high heat. Meanwhile, using a Y-shaped vegetable peeler, shave the purple carrots into very thin ribbons to equal 1 cup. Set aside. Shave enough other carrots into thin ribbons to equal ½ cup. Set aside separately. Slice the snap peas lengthwise into thin strips. Slice the asparagus stems into ¼ inch pieces, leaving the asparagus tips whole. Set aside.
2. Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the snap peas, asparagus, fresh peas (do not add frozen peas at this time) and scallions. Saute just until vegetables are barely tender, about 2-3 minutes. Add minced garlic and carrot ribbons (not the purple ones), and cook for 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper and set aside.
3. Place the purple carrot ribbons in a fine mesh strainer and lower into the boiling water. Blanch for 20 seconds, then lift out and set aside.
4. Drop the pasta into rapidly boiling water and cook until very al dente, about 2 minutes shorter than package directions. Ladle out ½ cup of the pasta cooking water and set aside. Drain well and transfer pasta to skillet of vegetables. If using frozen peas, add them now. Cook over medium high heat, tossing well. Add the crème fraîche, cheese, and lemon zest, tossing to combine. Add the reserved pasta cooking water if mixture seems dry. Add the pea shoots and toss to combine.
5. Turn the pasta into a heated serving bowl and top with the purple ribbons of carrots and chopped fresh parsley. Serves 4.



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KATHY HARRISON is a Barrington Hills resident who teaches the fine art of cooking.

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