

Pasta e Fagioli

In older Italian neighborhoods in Boston, New York, or New Jersey you may hear of an Italian dish that sounds something like “pasta fazool;” the correct pronunciation is (pasta eh fazh-e-ohl-eh). In the raunchy Jersey shore pronunciation they leave off the connecting “e” and “i” at the end. What ever way you say it, this classic Italian pasta and bean peasant dish is a staple at least a few times a month in many Italian homes. I learned it from the Maria Novi, the mother of John Novi the owner of the New York Times 4-star restaurant The Deput Canal House in High Falls, New York where I was the Chef de Cuisine in the mid-1980s.



Any white beans (I use navy most often)	4 cups
Imagine No-Chicken Broth	1 qt
Water	to cover+
Better than Bouillon No-Chicken Base	(2 tsp) to taste
Onion	1 large
Celery	4-5 med stalk
Green pepper	1 med
Garlic	½ bulb
Thyme	2 tsp
Oregano	2 tsp
Crushed red pepper	½ tsp
Bragg's Aminos	(1 Tbsp) to taste
Any type of raw Pasta	6-8 ounces
Roasted Red Pepper with liquor	2-3 med

The traditional way to start this soup – or stew – is by rendering a slab of fatback, salt pork, or bacon and browning what ever kind of chicken or pork you have lying around. Naturally you guessed that we’re going to modify that just a bit!

I use a pressure cooker to speed this along. If you don’t have one you may want to start this the night before by soaking the beans in water. This will allow you to reduce the cooking time quite considerably. Toss away the soaking liquid if you do that.

If you pressure cook the beans strain them and reserve the liquid. Add everything down to the Bragg’s Aminos and simmer until the vegetables are soft then add the cooked beans back in. If you’re using a regular pot, add the same ingredients *including* the soaked beans and cook until the beans are soft. Either way you’ll arrive at a place where the beans and vegetables are all cooked. Make sure you have a good strong simmer going and add the pasta. Stir vigilantly just until the pasta is cooked, add the chopped roasted peppers with their liquor and allow the pot to sit alone for a few minutes with the heat off. Make sure you don’t put the peppers in until the end or they will break apart and turn the entire soup red.

As with most peasant food there are as many variations to this as there are leftovers in the fridge! You can use any type of bean and although raw pasta is by far better to use because the starch thickens the soup and imparts quite a bit of flavor, leftover cooked pasta is often used. The addition I saw Mama Novi most often use was a handful of chopped greens of some kind at the start.