PENNE WITH PUMPKIN OR SQUASH

MAKES
4 TO 6 SERVINGS

TIME
30 MINUTES

I love filled pasta, but I rarely have the time or energy to make it. So, when I became enamored of pasta con zucca—a raviolilike affair stuffed with the Italian equivalent of pumpkin—I created this alternative, which is not quite as elegant but tastes just as good. If you cannot find a small pumpkin—the only kind whose flesh is dense enough for this dish—use butternut squash. Peel either with a paring knife; their skins are too tough for vegetable peelers.

INGREDIENTS

1 pound peeled and seeded pumpkin or butternut squash
Salt and black pepper to taste
2 tablespoons butter or extra virgin olive oil
1 pound penne or other cut pasta
1/2 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes, or more to taste
1/8 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg, or to taste
1 teaspoon sugar, optional
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut the squash into chunks and place in a food processor. Pulse the machine on and off until the squash appears grated. Alternatively, grate or chop the squash by hand. Bring a large pot of water to a boil for the pasta and add salt.

2. Place a large skillet over medium heat and add the butter. A minute later, add the squash, salt and pepper to taste, and about 1/2 cup water. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally and adding water about 1/4 cup at a time as the mixture dries out, being careful not to make it soupy, until the squash begins to disintegrate, after 10 or 15 minutes. Begin cooking the pasta at that point. While it cooks, season the squash with the red pepper, nutmeg, sugar if necessary, and additional salt and pepper if needed.
3. When the pasta is tender, scoop out about 1/2 cup of the cooking water and reserve it, then drain the pasta. Toss the pasta in the skillet with the squash, adding the reserved pasta-cooking water if the mixture seems dry. Taste and add more of any seasonings you like, then toss with the Parmesan and serve.

*Recipe from The Best Recipes in the World*