

## Aglia Olio e Pepperoncino

Serves 4 small portions (double the recipe for hefty eaters like myself) Aglio Olio e Pepperoncino is one of the secret “Mother Sauces” that no one in culinary school ever talks about. I wish they had because it would have been better than most of the outdated French sauces I cooked there. This dish is simply garlic cooked gently in olive oil, with crushed chili added towards the end. This is deceptively easy to make and to eat. Practice to make perfect, once you get this dish down, you will always be able to provide people with a knockout meal, even when you have very few resources at hand. It’s pantry cooking at its finest.

This is the most adaptable dish I know. On its own Aglio Olio e Pepperoncino is perfect so you don’t feel like you need to add to it but think for a minute of the possibilities. Add a little tomato and basil and it becomes a Pomodoro. Add leftover roasted cauliflower or some braised artichoke slices add roasted eggplant or some sautéed zucchini and summer squash, and with each addition it becomes several entirely different dishes characterized by the vegetable in the center of the sauce. Add some anchovies and top it with some lemony bread crumbs and any one of those variations becomes even better! Today restaurants are so specialized that you could probably have an aglio olio restaurant. That being said none of that matters if you don’t nail the basic recipe. This dish is one of the benchmarks I use to test young pasta cooks at Pastaria.

1 pound of thick spaghetti

6 large garlic cloves: finely chopped (about 2 ½ tablespoons)

1 teaspoon crushed red peppers

3 tablespoons olive oil

Salt for seasoning

Set a large pot of water over high heat. Be sure to salt it well because the noodles will absorb the salt with the water. The seasoned pasta is one of the keys to this dish. Add your pasta to the

boiling water and be sure to give it a good stir. When you think you are about 4 minutes from the pasta being done (you can set a timer based on the minimum cooking time on the box if you wish), start cooking your garlic. Put your olive oil in a large sauté pan and set it over medium heat. When the pan shows you its dimples, telling you that the oil is hot, add your garlic and immediately remove from heat. It is essential that you don't toast your garlic, so keep it moving with a spoon so it doesn't start to brown. You want your garlic to simmer a little in the oil, but your goal is to fully cook the garlic so that it is tender and without color. If a little bit gets brown, that is not the end of the world, but if half the pan browns, you won't be happy with the end results. (If this happens it is best to start over with fresh garlic and oil.) Return the pan to low heat and adjust the heat so that the oil is barely simmering. If it seems too hot take the pan off completely and allow it to cool down. After about 2 minutes of cooking the garlic add your chili to the pan and slowly cook that too, until the pasta is ready. When the pasta is bite-tender remove the spaghetti with a strainer and add it to the pan with the olive oil, garlic and crushed red pepper. Turn the heat up to medium-high and let the pasta cook while you toss it with a wooden spoon or tongs to combine the ingredients and coat the noodles with the sauce. Once everything comes together and the noodles are nicely coated with the sauce, divide the pasta among 4 individual bowls and top with grated grana padano. Eat immediately. Again, you may want to make a double batch because if you got it right, people will probably be clamoring for more.