

Creamy Tomato, Sausage & Fennel Mezze Maniche

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Gather & Feast

For a satisfying meal that's both comforting and easy to prepare, you have to try this Creamy Tomato, Sausage & Fennel Mezze Maniche. It features tender pork and fennel sausage in a rich tomato cream sauce, with a splash of white wine and a kick of chili that brings it to life. This recipe is ideal for a busy weeknight or a weekend dinner and pairs perfectly with a crisp, vibrant green salad for a complete meal.

SERVES 4 | **PREP TIME** 10 minutes | **COOK TIME** 20 minutes | **TOTAL TIME** 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 small or 1 medium-sized shallot, finely diced
- 4 cloves garlic, finely sliced
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds, lightly crushed (or left whole if preferred)
- A pinch of dried chili flakes (to your taste) (or 1/2 teaspoon Calabrian chili paste for more heat)
- 350g pork and fennel sausages (about 4), casings removed and broken into pieces
- 5 tablespoons tomato paste/tomato concentrate
- 125ml (1/2 cup) dry white wine
- 125ml (1/2 cup) thickened cream/heavy cream
- 40g (about 1/2 cup) Parmigiano Reggiano, freshly finely grated
- A large handful of fresh basil leaves, finely shredded
- 400g mezze maniche (you could also use rigatoni) (I've used Garofalo Pasta)
- Sea salt



METHOD

1. Have all ingredients prepped (mise en place) before you start, as the pasta and sauce cook simultaneously. The pasta will finish cooking in the sauce, so timing is key.
2. Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil. Add 2 generous pinches of sea salt—carefully taste the water; it should be salty like the sea, but not overwhelmingly so.
3. Add the mezze maniche and cook for 9 minutes, or 4-5 minutes under the package instructions for al dente. It will finish cooking in the sauce.
4. While the pasta cooks, heat the olive oil in a large frying pan over medium heat.
5. Add the diced shallot, garlic, fennel seeds, and chili flakes (or paste). Stir for a minute until fragrant.
6. Add the sausage to the pan and cook until browned, breaking it up as it cooks.
7. Push the sausage to the side of the pan, then add the tomato paste. Stir and cook it for 1-2 minutes until it turns a deep, brick-red colour. This step caramelises the paste, deepening its flavour, so don't skip it.
8. Stir the sausage back into the tomato paste, then pour in the white wine. Let it simmer for about a minute to reduce slightly.
9. Lower the heat, then stir in the cream. Simmer for a minute until the sauce comes together.
10. Just before the pasta is ready, stir the Parmigiano Reggiano and shredded basil into the sauce.
11. Scoop the mezze maniche directly into the pan, bringing a little pasta water with it.
12. Toss the pasta in the sauce, adding more starchy pasta water as needed to create a silky, creamy sauce. This process should take 2-3 minutes, and the pasta should reach al dente perfection.
13. Keep the sauce on the looser side—it will thicken slightly as it cools. Add more pasta water if needed to achieve the right consistency. I like to reserve some starchy pasta water in a jug on the side. If the pasta sits for a while and the sauce thickens, simply add a splash of the pasta water to loosen the sauce and reheat it.
14. Taste for seasoning and adjust if necessary. Serve the pasta hot, straight from the pan.

NOTES

Sausage Substitutions: If you can't find pork and fennel sausages, you can use regular pork sausages and add extra fennel seeds for that signature flavour.

Fennel Seeds: Lightly crushing the fennel seeds releases more flavour, but you can leave them whole if you don't have a spice grinder or mortar and pestle.

Tomato Paste: Caramelising the tomato paste is key to adding depth and richness to the sauce. Make sure you cook it until it deepens in colour, as this step enhances the overall flavour.

Wine Substitute: If you'd like to avoid alcohol, substitute the white wine with an equal amount water along with a splash of lemon juice or vinegar to add brightness to mimic the acidity of wine.

Pasta Shape: Mezze maniche is a short, ribbed pasta that holds the sauce beautifully, but rigatoni, calamarata or even fusilli work well too. If you're gluten-free, use a suitable pasta alternative and adjust cooking time accordingly.

Pasta Water is Key: Adding starchy pasta water is crucial for creating a silky, emulsified sauce. Don't skip this step—it helps bind the sauce to the pasta and keeps it from getting too thick.

Spice Levels: Adjust the chili flakes or Calabrian chili paste based on your spice tolerance. A pinch adds mild warmth, but feel free to increase the amount for a spicier kick.

Make-Ahead Tips: While this dish is best served fresh, you can make the sauce ahead of time and store it in the fridge for up to 2 days. When reheating, add reserved pasta water as required to loosen the sauce.

Leftover Pasta: If leftovers sit and the sauce thickens, reheat the pasta over high heat with some of the reserved starchy pasta water to bring back its creamy consistency.

Serving Suggestion: I like to serve this dish with a crisp and vibrant green salad.



Find the recipe and watch the video online:

<https://www.gatherandfeast.com/creamy-tomato-sausage-fennel-mezze-maniche>

Let me know if you make the recipe! x **@gatherandfeast**