



Barely Heat Kissed

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The orto, our garden, is producing and life is good. Our store bought produce has dwindled to lemons and oranges. If we could figure out a way to bring lemon or better yet, lime trees, inside for the winter, then life would be just about perfect. Most people around here have lemon trees in large pots that they bring inside for the winter, but with our nomadic lifestyle, that won't work.

I like to play with fire, so after harvesting some ripe tomatoes and a fistful of basil, I decided to experiment with adding just a kiss of heat to two different dishes. Just a bacio of heat to soften up the tomato sauce, and another kiss to add a warm parmigiana crust to a fresh tomato salad, why didn't I try this sooner?

Spaghetti d'Estate Summer Spaghetti

5 plum tomatoes, chopped
1 large handful of fresh basil leaves
1 small red onion, or sweet white onion, thinly sliced
2 cloves of garlic, thinly sliced
1 handful of small olives
Cheese for grating
Olive oil
500g pasta/serves 2

Put your pasta water on to boil. Choose a fine spaghetti like angel hair, spaghettini, vermicelli. Finely chop the basil and place in a bowl large enough to hold the pasta. Chop the tomatoes and set aside in another bowl.

While the pasta water is coming to a boil, gently heat the sliced onion and garlic in a few tablespoons of olive oil. Turn the pan off if you hear the faintest sound of a sizzle, you want to wilt the garlic and onions, make them loose their crunchy rawness, but that's all.

When the pasta is done, before you drain it, take about 1/2 cup of the pasta water and add it to the basil/oil mixture. Now drain the pasta and toss with the basil oil. Plate the pasta in a big bowl. Turn the heat back on and warm up the onion/garlic mixture, add the tomatoes and olives and toss until the tomatoes are just warm...about 30 seconds. If you are using an electric stove, preheat the coil so when the pan is put on there is quick heat.

Add the warmed tomato sauce to the basil pasta and serve with a soft, quick melting cheese. In Umbria, I use 'caciotta' which is a fresh cheese made from sheep and cow milk. Try to find a soft, fresh cheese, not too aggressively flavored, or else use just a fine mist of freshly grated parmigiana.

Jeff wanted to know why the pasta felt so 'velvety' in his mouth, and so flavorful. The secret is that bit of pasta water added to the basil oil and left to sit for a few moments while you heat kiss the tomatoes and

olives. Don't skip this step, ok?

Heat Kissed Tomato Salad

1 gorgeous tomato

Freshly grated parmigiana

Oregano, Olive Oil, Salt, Pepper

Turn on your broiler to its highest setting, and move the oven rack up as close as you can.

Now, slice and arrange that gorgeous tomato in a heat proof dish. Sprinkle with salt, pepper and oregano.

Add a little drizzle of olive oil.

Generously grate the parmigiana over the tomatoes, making sure to cover all of the exposed tomatoes.

Place in the broiler and remove as **SOON** as it melts! In my oven, it took under 30 seconds. The bottom of the dish wasn't even warm, and it was out of the heat, making a crispy cheesy veil over the barely warmed tomatoes. It was almost as if the tomatoes were only sun warmed from the garden.

Add another tiny drizzle of olive oil and enjoy! A crust of bread to sop up the tomato juices would be a fine thing.

Tomatoes in August are a reason to live.

Image (optional):

