

FOOD

5 artisan pasta places in Wisconsin to help flavor a summer meal

Jennifer Rude Klett Special to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

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Warmer months are an ideal time for cooking pasta.

While far from seasonal, pasta practically sings with spring asparagus and flat-leaf parsley, then summertime tomatoes, squashes and freshly cured garlic. No hot oven is needed to prepare it; enjoy it hot, cold or room temperature alongside anything grilled or by itself.

Plus, there are now so many flavorful pastas made with vegetables, herbs and specialty grains, it's easier than ever to whip up dinner in minutes.

Find local artisan pasta made right here in Wisconsin at farmers markets, retail stores and online for quick, healthful and delicious homemade meals.

Options include everything from Old World traditional pasta to gluten-free and vegan options. Many varieties cook in a minute or two and do not need heavy sauces to taste good.

Just keep the olive oil and Parmesan cheese handy.

To make it summertime easy for home cooks, here are a few Wisconsin pasta producers to consider, along with upcoming deals, seasonal varieties and cooking tips.

More: A guide to Milwaukee area farmers markets open in 2023

Handcrafted from Appleton

Dalla Terra in Appleton produces 10 different shapes and over 30 flavors of dried, shelf-stable pastas, according to Liam Connolly, a second-generation artisan pasta maker who owns the company with his wife, Kithara.

“Our pasta is handcrafted by us,” said Connolly. “We love to source locally right here in Wisconsin with spinach, beets, peppers and basil. It’s a really easy meal.”

Dalla Terra's pasta cooks in about half the time as typical boxed dried pasta. Connolly said their pasta is unique because they do not use powdered foods in their flavored pastas. Instead, it's flavored with fresh whole foods, herbs and spices, primarily organic. Then, the pasta is dried at a low temperature over several days to preserve taste and nutrients.

"That's how we get such a vibrant color and flavor, but it's much more time intensive that way," Connolly said.

They also use bronze dies to extrude or form their dough, which results in a rougher textured pasta that helps grab sauce. Home cooks don't have to add much to enjoy their pasta, Connolly said.

"We flavor the pasta ourselves so people just have to add a little olive oil and cheese. Ten minutes – dinner," he said.

Dalla Terra's bestsellers include its garden rainbow fusilli in colorful spiral shapes; spinach garlic tagliatelle, which is similar to fettuccini; sea salt tagliatelle; and veggie and herbs shapes.

Connolly's favorite way to enjoy his pasta changes, but in warmer months, it's pasta salad with celery, tomatoes, Parmesan cheese and walnuts or pecans.

Dalla Terra's most unusual offering? It's chocolate tagliatelle, made with unsweetened cocoa, Connolly said. While it can be made sweet, they like to make it savory, according to Kithara. She compared the taste appeal to a Mexican mole sauce. "We kind of describe the flavor as earthy and slightly bitter," Kithara said.

Dalla Terra's dark-colored squid ink tagliatelle is another unusual pasta. "There isn't a whole lot of flavor to it, just saltier," Kithara explained. "It often is just used for color. It's good with seafood like shrimp."

Dalla Terra pastas can be purchased through their website, dallaterrapasta.com and in stores throughout Wisconsin and Illinois, including Sendik's Food Market, Metcalfe's Market (Wauwatosa only), West Allis Cheese & Sausage Shoppe, Stone Bank Farm Market and Outpost Natural Foods.

Dalla Terra is also selling at the Appleton Farmers Market this summer.

RP's, Taste Republic from Madison

If you're looking for fresh pasta made in the Italian tradition, try RP's Pasta, made in Madison. It also offers gluten-free pasta, formerly sold under the RP's name but now under a separate Taste Republic brand name.

"We sell 27 different pastas under RP's and then Taste Republic, 14," said marketing director Andy Allcock, for a total of 41 types. "We make delicious pasta for the whole family, and it's sold in the refrigerator and frozen section of stores and online."

"Because it is fresh, one of the real benefits is it's going to cook a lot quicker in 2 or 3 minutes," he said.

Of the two pasta brands, Allcock said, the company sells more gluten-free Taste Republic than RP's wheat-based pasta. They make fettuccini, linguini, raviolini (a small ravioli), ravioli, campanelli, angel hair, lasagna, fusilli and rigatoni in various flavors such as egg, spinach, pumpkin, roasted red pepper and whole wheat.

The No. 1 seller is four-cheese tortelloni.

"It's a durable shape," Allcock said. "People love it."

The four-cheese tortelloni is also Allcock's personal favorite pasta; he prefers it prepared with just olive oil and salt. "I don't like to cover it with a heavier sauce that will kind of mask the flavor of it. Boil it for 2 to 3 minutes, toss it with some olive oil and salt. Sometimes I will sprinkle some Parmesan cheese, sometimes pepper," he explained.

Allcock said he was surprised how quickly the company's pasta sales have grown since the shelter-in-place orders in 2020, a trend that sees no sign of slowing down. Home cooks, he said, "really started to explore things more trying to make something a little fancier."

Even prior to the pandemic, longer-term trends have been good for pasta.

"In the last two decades, it's really expanded into so much more," he said. For example, the company's gluten-free pastas are made from cauliflower, chickpeas or red lentils and offer a lot more protein than typical wheat-based pastas, he said.

A tomato and feta tortelloni from Taste Republic that's made with hot honey is a new pasta available in May, he said. "Hot honey is basically honey with dried red pepper flakes," Allcock explained.

RP's Pasta is available at Sendik's Food Market, Lake Mills Market, Woodman's, Metcalfe's Market and Whole Foods. Taste Republic gluten-free pasta is sold in those stores plus Pick n' Save.

For a limited-time, Allcock said, the popular four-cheese tortellini will be available at a discounted price at Midwestern Costco stores starting July 3 for about six to eight weeks. Two 12-ounce packs will be sold for \$8.99, he said, "which is a really good deal for our pasta."

Semolina MKE in Bay View

In Bay View, find handcrafted dried and fresh pasta at Semolina MKE.

For now, Semolina's pasta is sold only at its shop at 2474 S. Kinnickinnic Ave., and at the South Shore Farmers Market for the summer, according to owner and pasta maker Petra Orłowski. Eventually, she hopes to sell some products online.

"Bucatini is definitely our bestselling extruded dry pasta," she said, of the thick, long, tube-like pasta. "And then our colored culurgiones are a big seller, that's the pasta that's stuffed with mashed potatoes, cheesy garlic mashed potatoes."

Semolina MKE sources fresh, local ingredients to capture the best aspects of Old World pasta tradition, according to Orłowski.

"I do use stone-ground wheat from Meadowlark Mills from Ridgeway, Wisconsin. That's an organic wheat," she added.

Her personal favorite pasta is pappardelle. "I like the wide noodles. I like how it feels when you're eating it, and it's great with so many different types of sauces," Orłowski said.

Semolina MKE does have a few openings for its popular cooking classes in May for ravioli, hand-shaped pasta and classic egg dough, check semolinamke.com for dates. No classes are scheduled for summer.

The shop is also participating in the upcoming Bay View Gallery Night with music, wine, cheese, and samples of its Italian specialty products on June 2.

More: Drawing on Sicilian heritage, Semolina MKE owner makes pasta and teaches classes in Bay View

Glorioso's Italian Market on Milwaukee's Brady Street

Along with an abundance of foods from Italy, the landmark Glorioso's Italian Market, 1011 E. Brady St., sells its own pasta made using family recipes, according to general manager Michael Glorioso.

While much is sold through the website, *gloriosos.com*, including dried pasta, the fresh and fresh frozen pasta is sold only at Glorioso's market, a fixture in Milwaukee since 1946.

"People come here to have an Italian shopping experience," Glorioso said. "What people really do come here is for the Glorioso's fresh frozen and frozen filled family recipes."

As for specific pastas, find asiago-filled gnocchi, cheese manicotti, mushroom ravioli and spinach linguine, to name a few.

As with the other pasta makers, Glorioso said people continue to embrace home cooking . . . and especially pasta in the past few years. "The pandemic has been very good for our business. Cooking more at home, it's certainly a lot less expensive to make the food and stretch your dollar," he said.

Penne rigate is Glorioso's favorite pasta. "It's a short tubular noodle, and it has ribs on it. I like it with any of the Glorioso family recipe red sauces," he said, such as the marinara or puttanesca sauces.

Pasta tip from Glorioso's Italian Market: When cooking at home, make use of the valuable leftover pasta cooking water, also known as "liquid gold" in the world of Italian cooking. A few tablespoons of the starchy pasta water added to the sauce will help emulsification and boost flavor. The pasta water creates a silky texture that will help the sauce adhere to the pasta. Or, treat pasta water like stock to use later in soups, stews, gravy or risotto.

Clario Farmstead Pasta from Door County

Fresh frozen artisan pasta made by Clario Farmstead Pasta in Door County is available at four farmers markets this summer: Wauwatosa, or in Door County's Sturgeon Bay, Jacksonport and Bailey's Harbor markets. Or, visit Clario's retail store at 19 N. Third Ave. in Sturgeon Bay to find pasta, sauces, pesto, wines, cheese and other small-batch local products.

"We make fresh pastas with vegetables and herbs from our garden, fresh free-range farm eggs from barnyard chickens," said Mario Micheli, who owns Clario Farmstead Pasta with his

wife, Claire Thompson. “We make fresh pasta and we freeze it so people can have fresh pasta whenever they want. It will cook in a minute or two.”

The astute may notice the name Clario is a combination of their first names. “We came up with this long before there was a Bennifer,” Micheli said. Combining names for a farm name is not uncommon in Door County, he explained.

“We do have 20 or so different types of pasta we are selling at the store,” Micheli said. “Our top sellers are any of the spinach pastas that we make — pappardelle, linguine.”

More: Want pasta made from organic produce and ingredients? It's at a new shop in Sturgeon Bay

“Lemon pepper linguine is a real popular one for use now,” he added, along with kale black pepper and carrot turmeric fettuccini.” Later in the season, they offer seasonal pastas using lemon dill, butternut squash and garlic basil.

As with other Wisconsin pasta makers, Micheli suggested home cooks simply add olive oil or butter, and cheese as their pastas have so much flavor by themselves.

His personal favorite is kale black pepper. “It’s my go-to. It’s the easiest. Any sauce or olive oil,” he said. “It’s just got a rich vegetable flavor, and that black pepper gives it a little heat.”

Pasta Rustica in Beloit

Finally, if you’re in south central Wisconsin, find Pasta Rustica in Beloit. Owner Tara Lamb crafts hand-made, traditional Italian pasta made with local and organically grown ingredients when possible.

“Our focus is the southern Italian-style pasta,” said Lamb. “They make wonderful peasant-style pasta with no egg and no oil.”

Her main pasta is reginette, a long ribbon-like pasta with fluted edges that’s a little wider than fettuccine. “Red pepper garlic is probably the most popular one,” she said.

Her favorite version is the fennel.

As with the other Wisconsin pasta producers, Lamb likes her pasta simply prepared. “Fresh tomatoes, a little bit of olive oil and a little bit of salt,” she explained.

Find Pasta Rustica pasta only at the Beloit Farmers Market on Saturdays, the second largest farmers market in the state.

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Whole-Wheat Linguine with Spinach, Garlic & Parmesan is a quick dinner prepared on the stovetop ready in about 30 minutes. Add a grilled steak, pork chop or chicken breast if desired, but the pasta is so satisfying and full-flavored you won't miss the meat.

Fresh spinach is usually available in May at farmers markets, along with fresh pasta from Wisconsin producers. If using fresh pasta, keep in mind it will need to be boiled only about a minute or two before transferring to the sauté pan. This is delicious with fresh asparagus or a leaf lettuce salad on the side.

Whole-wheat linguine with spinach, garlic and Parmesan

Makes four servings

Recipe tested by Jennifer Rude Klett

12 ounces whole-wheat linguine

4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 tomatoes, chopped (chopped dried tomatoes or a 15-ounce can of tomatoes may be used instead of fresh)

4 cloves garlic, minced

1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes

salt and pepper to taste

1/2 teaspoon dried oregano

1 1/2 cup fresh spinach, chopped

3/4 cup Parmesan cheese, grated

Fresh flat-leafed parsley to taste, chopped

Slightly undercook pasta by one minute according to package directions in large saucepan on stovetop. While pasta is cooking, sauté tomatoes over medium heat with olive oil in large sauté pan until soft, about 5 minutes. Add garlic for last few seconds (do not let garlic brown). Add the mostly cooked pasta to large sauté pan using tongs; add a scoop or two of the pasta water to finish off the pasta uncovered in the sauté pan. Add red pepper flakes, salt, pepper, oregano and spinach and heat for about a minute. Mix in cheese and top with parsley.