

# Think Small When Making Potluck Pasta Salads

BY SUSAN M. SELASKY  
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What is orzo? How do you cook Israeli couscous? Can you say orecchiette?

There's a dizzying array of dry pastas on store shelves. Some have fancy names for something that's basically macaroni.

We're giving big pasta like elbows and corkscrews the summer off and downsizing for potluck salads.

Too often dainty pastas like orzo and ditalini wind up in soups, but they're great for salads and just as economical as their big sisters.

And they cook more quickly because of their size, so you can make pasta salad in a snap.

Larger pasta shapes tend to overwhelm the other ingredients. Small ones make room for scooping it all up in every bite.

Pasta salads are must-haves for feeding a crowd because they go a long way.

When making, allow about 1 cup of salad per serving if you're having just one salad and a half cup if you have two or more salads. About 50 percent of your salad should be made up of pasta and the rest should be vegetables or other ingredients.

Here are some smaller shapes to try:

- Orzo is rice-shaped and less than 1/4-inch long when cooked. Besides salads and soups, you can serve it as a side dish or stuff it in hollowed tomatoes.
- Couscous comes in two sizes. The smaller version is sometimes mistaken for a grain; the larger, also called Israeli couscous, is pearl-sized. The latter has been showing up in more and more recipes, including salads. Israeli couscous adds little starchy bursts to today's Israeli Couscous with Watermelon, Watercress and Feta.
- In Italian, orecchiette (oh-rayk-kee-EHT-tay) means "little ears," after the pasta's shape. Orecchiette is a good change-up for salad because it's not super small but still not huge.

Whatever pasta you choose, putting it in a salad offers an easy way to use the other bits and pieces lurking in your refrigerator. Have half a bell pepper or cucumber? Chop it up and toss it in.

You can use just about any raw or cooked vegetable in a pasta salad. Meats, too. Think chunks of ham or salami, prosciutto and even leftover rotisserie chicken. Shredded or cut up cheeses are also good additions.

Smaller pastas do better with a vinaigrette-style dressing. That way, they don't get lost in heavy mayonnaise and other creamy dressings.

A fruity extra-virgin olive oil works best, but you also can use regular olive oil.

And if you can't bear to stray from the corkscrew or penne pastas, you can find mini versions. A few years ago, Barilla pasta introduced its piccolini (meaning "little ones") line of mini pastas. Look for farfelle (bowties), penne, fusilli and gemelli.

small florets (about 5-6 cups)  
1/2 cup finely chopped green onions  
1/2 cup sliced black olives  
1 small carrot, grated  
1 cup corn, cut fresh from the cob, optional  
1 teaspoon dried leaf oregano  
1 clove garlic, pressed or crushed and finely minced  
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper  
1/3 cup olive oil  
1/4 cup red wine vinegar  
Salt to taste

Cook orzo following package directions. During the last 3 minutes, add the broccoli. Drain in a colander and rinse lightly with cold water.

In a large bowl, place the orzo and broccoli, green onions, olives, carrot,

corn if using, oregano, garlic and pepper.

In a glass measuring cup, whisk together the oil and red wine vinegar, and then toss with the salad ingredients. Add salt to taste. Chill one hour before serving.

Adapted from www.about.com.  
Tested by Susan M. Selasky in the Free Press Test Kitchen.

194 calories (46 percent from fat), 11 grams fat (1 gram sat. fat), 22 grams carbohydrates, 6 grams protein, 254 mg sodium, 0 mg cholesterol, 5 grams fiber

**ORECCHIETTE SALAD WITH GRILLED VEGETABLES**

Serves: 8  
Preparation time: 10 minutes  
Total time: 30 minutes

Grilling lessens the natural bitterness of radicchio. A splash of sweet balsamic vinegar balances it.

8 ounces orecchiette (about 2 cups)

1 small head radicchio, halved lengthwise and cored  
2 small bulbs fennel, cored and cut into 1/4-inch wedges, plus 1/4 cup chopped fennel fronds  
8 assorted baby bell peppers, halved and seeded  
1/2 cup olive oil, divided  
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

1 can (15 ounces) cannellini beans, drained and rinsed  
Juice and zest of 1 lemon  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

1 1/2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar  
3 ounces Parmesan cheese, shaved with a vegetable peeler

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook until al dente (about 2 minutes less than the label directs). Drain and set aside.

Preheat a grill to medium-high. Place the radicchio, fennel wedges and bell peppers in a large bowl; drizzle with 1/4 cup olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Grill vegetables, turning occasionally, until charred and crisp-tender, about 4 minutes for the peppers and radicchio, 6 minutes for the fennel. Remove from the grill and let cool, then cut into small pieces.

Transfer to a serving bowl.

Add the cooked pasta, cannellini beans, the remaining 1/4 cup olive oil,

lemon juice and zest, parsley, balsamic vinegar, 1/4 teaspoon salt and pepper to taste. Toss to combine. Add the Parmesan shavings and fennel fronds and toss again gently. Serve immediately or refrigerate, covered, up to 6 hours. Bring to room temperature before serving.

Adapted from www.foodnetwork.com.  
Tested by Susan M. Selasky in the Free Press Test Kitchen.

304 calories (37 percent from fat), 13 grams fat (3 grams sat. fat), 37 grams carbohydrates, 13 grams protein, 467 mg sodium, 8 mg cholesterol, 6 grams fiber

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**DITALINI CHOPPED SALAD**

Serves: 16  
Preparation time: 20 minutes  
Total time: 45 minutes

This is a perfect potluck salad because it feeds a crowd. Bell peppers, cucumber and romaine add crunch, while salami adds that meaty taste. You could substitute leftover chicken for salami.

16 ounces ditalini pasta  
2 cups cubed provolone or shredded Italian cheese blend  
4 cups chopped romaine  
1 medium red onion, diced  
1 cup chopped red, yellow or orange peppers  
1/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley  
1 cup seeded and diced cucumber  
1/3 pound cubed salami

**FOR DRESSING**  
2 large shallots, peeled  
3 cloves garlic, peeled  
1/4 cup Dijon mustard  
1/4 cup red wine vinegar  
2 teaspoons sugar  
3/4 cup olive oil  
Salt and pepper to taste

Cook the pasta according to package directions. Drain and spread it out on a baking sheet for 30 minutes.

In a large serving bowl, combine pasta, cheese, romaine, red onion, peppers, parsley, cucumber and salami.

For the dressing, place the shallots and garlic in a blender or food processor. Pulse several times to chop. Add the Dijon, red wine vinegar and sugar. Pulse to combine.

With the blender or processor running, slowly add the oil in a steady stream to emulsify. Taste and adjust seasonings and ingredients as necessary. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss to combine.

From and tested by Susan M. Selasky in the Free Press Test Kitchen.

290 calories (49 percent from fat), 16 grams fat (5 grams sat. fat), 27 grams carbohydrates, 11 grams protein, 525 mg sodium, 21 mg cholesterol, 2 grams fiber

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