

PICI CACIO E PEPE

Literally 'cheese and pepper', this minimalist cacio e pepe recipe is like a stripped-down mac and cheese. It's a dish traditionally associated with Rome, sometimes prepared at the table in a giant hollowed out wheel of pecorino romano cheese as a show stopping display.

But Rome isn't the only city to claim this dish as its own. Cacio e Pepe is widely prepared across Tuscany too, traditionally served with locally-made Tuscan pecorino and pici - a local, hand rolled spaghetti native to Siena.

Dating back to the Etruscans, pici were made from only flour and water, the poor everyday pasta of the Sieneese peasants. The name comes from the term "appiciare", which refers to the traditional manual technique used to form these long, thick noodles. On Sundays, a little egg was added to the dough to make it richer.

The secret of cacio e pepe is the creamy sauce, obtained by combining high quality pecorino and a few spoons of the pasta water used to cook the pici.

The cheese and the starch from the pasta cooking water are the only ingredients to make this original cacio e pepe sauce seem creamy, but the Sieneese sometimes sneak in a tablespoon of butter to make things extra decadent.

What you'll need (serves 4, easily)

Ingredients:

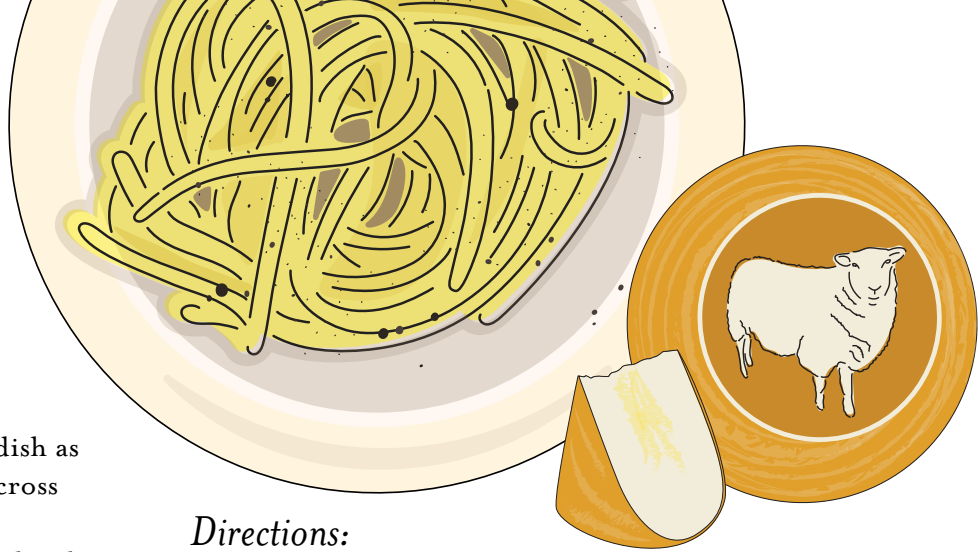
400G DRIED PICI

180G AGED TUSCAN PECORINO

FINELY GRATED (plus extra to serve)

1 TBSP BUTTER (optional)

1 TBSP BLACK PEPPER, FRESHLY CRACKED



Directions:

Put a large pot of water to boil. Add salt once water comes to boil, taste to make sure water is as salty as the sea. Add the pici once water is at a full boil. Cook according to the packet instructions (as general guidance) but taste/check the middle along the way/ towards the end of suggested cook time. Dried pici because of thickness and if made artisanally can take up to 18-25 minutes to cook; never trust the timer but instead your palate/touch. The noodle should feel flimsy but not too firm and there should be a tiny bit of white still to the inside core of the noodle. But ultimately, al dente is determined by its bite/give when you taste it- and how you prefer it.

Meanwhile, combine the pecorino, butter (optional) and black pepper in a large bowl. Add 4oz/half a cup of the pasta water once the pasta is almost done cooking as to ensure starch has been released into the water and quickly stir with a fine whisk or a fork of choice until cheese and water forms a paste, if too dry you can add more water or instead of draining noodles, use tongs to transfer directly where some water is retained to give more saucy texture. Add drained (or via tongs) cooked pici, toss well in a bowl with pecorino mixture (or in a warm pasta pan if you prefer to jump to coat, having added pecorino), divide among plates and serve hot topped with extra pecorino and more cracked pepper to taste.

Wine pairing: A full bodied white wine like Vernaccia di San Gimignano or aged (slightly oaked) Chardonnay from Northern Italy or one of the bottles from our wine club.



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*Buon
appetito!*