

## Rigatoni with Mushrooms, Spinach, Pancetta, Caramelized Onions and Cream

3/4 pound rigatoni pasta, almost al dente

Extra virgin olive oil to taste

1/2 ounce Porcini mushrooms, reconstituted in ~1/2 cup warm water for 30 minutes

2 large white onions, sliced 1/2-inch thick and cooked in 3 tablespoons unsalted butter until golden

1/2 pound thinly sliced pancetta, cut into 1/2-inch thick strips and browned

1 pound Portobello mushrooms or a combination Portobello and white mushrooms, stemmed, wiped clean, and cut into 1 inch pieces

1 tablespoon finely chopped garlic

1 tablespoon finely chopped shallots (optional)

Flamed with dry Madeira or Brandy (optional)

1 3/4 cups heavy cream

10 ounces fresh spinach, rinsed and stemmed

1 tablespoon fresh thyme

1 cup freshly grated Parmesan

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Bring a large pot of water (7 quarts) to boil over high heat, add 2 tablespoons Kosher salt and the rigatoni, and cook, stirring occasionally, checking at five minutes, or until almost al dente.

Strain the pasta in a colander, toss with 1 tablespoon of olive oil.

\* Do this step as close to possible to when your sauce is ready.

With a slotted spoon, remove the soaked mushrooms from the liquid and strain the liquid through a fine sieve lined with dampened cheesecloth, or a coffee filter, into a bowl. Reserve the liquid.

If the Porcini mushrooms are still dirty, rinse them and pat dry.

Trim the stems and coarsely chop the mushrooms.

In a 2 1/2 quart oven proof casserole set over moderately low heat, melt the butter and add the onions, and salt and pepper to taste and cook, stirring occasionally for 20 minutes, or until the onions are golden brown and tender. Transfer the onions to a plate.

Add the pancetta to the casserole, increase the heat to moderate and cook, stirring occasionally for 15 minutes, or until the pancetta begins to brown. With a slotted spoon, transfer the pancetta to the plate with the onions.

Add the Portobello mushrooms to the casserole, season with salt and pepper and cook the mushrooms, stirring occasionally for 10 minutes, or until tender. Add the garlic and shallots if you like, stirring for 4 minutes.

Flame with Madeira or Brandy if desired.

Add the chopped Porcini mushrooms, strained mushroom juice, onions, pancetta, 1/2 cup or so of the Parmesan, and the heavy cream to the casserole.

Simmer, stirring occasionally for 10 minutes, or until mushroom flavor is pronounced in the cream.

Add the pasta, spinach, thyme, salt, and pepper and gently toss the mixture with the remaining Parmesan.

Taste for seasoning and correct.

Transfer the casserole to the oven and bake for 20 minutes, or until cream is bubbling.

Serves 4 - 6