

Zesty Italian Pasta Salad

Bright, colorful, and bursting with flavor, this Zesty Italian Pasta Salad is the ultimate side dish for any occasion. It's filled with rotini pasta, crisp vegetables, savory meats, and creamy mozzarella pearls, all tossed in a bold Italian dressing that adds the perfect kick. Every bite is tangy, refreshing, and packed with texture. Whether you're making it for a barbecue, picnic, or weeknight dinner, this recipe guarantees to bring fresh flavor to your table.

Why You'll Love This Zesty Italian Pasta Salad

Full of Fresh Flavor and Crunch

This salad is vibrant and satisfying. It combines crunchy bell peppers, juicy cherry tomatoes, tangy olives, and spicy pepperoni, giving each bite a mix of flavors and textures. The dressing's bold, zesty flavor ties it all together beautifully.

Easy to Make and Serve

You can prepare it in under 30 minutes, and it tastes even better after chilling. It's the perfect make-ahead dish for parties, meal prep, or potlucks. The longer it sits, the more flavorful it becomes.

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- Author: [Aaron recipes](#)
- Total Time: [30 minutes](#)
- Yield: [6 servings](#)
- Diet: [Vegetarian](#)

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Description

Zesty Italian Pasta Salad with rotini, colorful veggies, meats, and mozzarella tossed in a bold, tangy Italian dressing. A quick and vibrant crowd-pleaser.

Ingredients

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- ☐ Rotini pasta – 1 lb
 - ☐ Pepperoni (quartered) – 3.5 oz
 - ☐ Salami (quartered) – 4 oz
 - ☐ Cherry tomatoes (halved) – 1 pint
 - ☐ Black olives (halved) – 1 cup
 - ☐ Red, orange, and green bell peppers (diced) – 1 of each
 - ☐ Red onion (finely diced) – ½ cup
 - ☐ Chopped pepperoncini – 2 tbsp
 - ☐ Mozzarella pearls – 8 oz
 - ☐ Grated Parmesan & parsley – for garnish
 - ☐ Olive oil – ¾ cup
 - ☐ Red wine vinegar – ¼ cup
 - ☐ Lemon juice – 2 tbsp
 - ☐ Parmesan (finely grated) – ¼ cup
 - ☐ Dried parsley, basil, garlic powder, onion powder – 1 tsp each
 - ☐ Oregano, paprika, black pepper – ½ tsp each
 - ☐ Salt – ¾ tsp
 - ☐ Sugar – ½ tsp
 - ☐ Cook Mode Prevent your screen from going dark
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Instructions

1. In a jar, combine olive oil, vinegar, lemon juice, Parmesan, and all herbs. Shake for 30 seconds until blended. Refrigerate until ready to use.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook pasta until al dente. Drain well.
3. While pasta is still warm, toss with half of the prepared dressing.
4. Add pepperoni, salami, tomatoes, olives, peppers, onion, pepperoncini, and mozzarella.
5. Toss gently until evenly coated. Chill for at least 30 minutes.
6. Before serving, add the remaining dressing and toss again.
7. Garnish with Parmesan and parsley. Serve cold or at room temperature.

Notes

Cook pasta al dente for the best texture.

Chill before serving for maximum flavor.

Add artichokes or roasted peppers for variation.

Store in an airtight container for up to 4 days.

- Prep Time: 10 minutes
- Cook Time: 20 minutes
- Category: Salad
- Method: Mixing
- Cuisine: Italian-American

Nutrition

- **Serving Size:** 1 cup
 - **Calories:** 350
 - **Sugar:** 4g
 - **Sodium:** 480mg
 - **Fat:** 18g
 - **Saturated Fat:** 6g
 - **Unsaturated Fat:** 9g
 - **Trans Fat:** 0g
 - **Carbohydrates:** 36g
 - **Fiber:** 3g
 - **Protein:** 11g
 - **Cholesterol:** 30mg
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Choosing the Best Ingredients

Picking the Right Pasta

Rotini pasta is ideal because its spirals hold the dressing perfectly. You can also use penne, fusilli, or bowtie pasta. Cook it al dente so it stays firm even after chilling in the dressing.

Selecting Quality Mix-Ins

Fresh vegetables make this dish shine. Use a mix of red, orange, and green bell peppers for color. Cherry tomatoes add juiciness, while black olives and red onion add tang. For richness, add pepperoni, salami, and mozzarella pearls.

Making the Zesty Italian Dressing

Blending the Ingredients

In a jar, combine olive oil, red wine vinegar, lemon juice, Parmesan, and a blend of dried herbs like basil, oregano, and parsley. Shake or whisk until emulsified. The dressing should taste tangy, herby, and slightly sweet.

Adjusting the Flavor

Taste and tweak as needed. Add a pinch of sugar to balance the acidity or an extra squeeze of lemon for brightness. Freshly grated Parmesan deepens the flavor and gives the dressing a creamy finish.

Preparing the Pasta Salad

Cooking and Cooling the Pasta

Boil the pasta in salted water until al dente, then drain well. While it's still slightly warm, toss it with half of the Italian dressing. The warmth helps the pasta absorb the flavors, creating a delicious base.

Combining the Ingredients

Add cherry tomatoes, diced bell peppers, olives, red onion, pepperoni, salami, and mozzarella pearls to the dressed pasta. Toss everything gently but thoroughly until evenly coated.

Chilling and Serving

Why Chilling Enhances Flavor

Chilling the pasta salad for at least 30 minutes allows the dressing to soak into the noodles and the flavors to meld together. It also gives the salad a cool, refreshing texture — perfect for hot days.

Serving Tips

Before serving, drizzle the remaining dressing over the salad and toss again. Garnish with extra Parmesan and fresh parsley for a restaurant-quality presentation. Serve it as a side dish or make it a meal by adding grilled chicken or shrimp.

Tips for Perfect Zesty Italian Pasta Salad

Keep It Fresh

If making ahead, store the salad and dressing separately. Toss them together right before serving for the best texture and flavor.

Customize Your Ingredients

Add artichoke hearts, roasted red peppers, or sun-dried tomatoes for a Mediterranean twist. For a vegetarian version, skip the meats and double up on the veggies.

Storing and Leftovers

How to Store

Keep leftovers in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to four days. Stir before serving to refresh the dressing. The flavors continue to deepen as it sits, making it even more delicious the next day.

Quick Refresh

If the salad seems dry after chilling, add a splash of olive oil or vinegar before serving. This brightens the flavor and restores the zesty punch.

FAQs About Zesty Italian Pasta Salad

Can I use bottled Italian dressing instead of homemade?

Yes, but homemade dressing has a fresher, more balanced flavor. It's easy to make and elevates the salad beautifully.

Can I make this pasta salad a day in advance?

Absolutely. It's best made a few hours ahead so the flavors can develop. Add extra dressing just before serving for freshness.

What other cheeses work well?

You can use cubed provolone or feta instead of mozzarella pearls for a slightly different flavor.

How can I make it healthier?

Use whole-grain pasta, reduce the oil slightly, and replace half the salami and pepperoni with more veggies or chickpeas.

Conclusion

This Zesty Italian Pasta Salad is a flavorful, versatile dish that's perfect for any occasion. With its tangy dressing, colorful mix-ins, and bold flavors, it's a salad that stands out on every table. It's quick to prepare, easy to customize, and guaranteed to please both kids and adults. The combination of herbs, citrus, and savory meats makes it irresistible. For another flavor-packed idea, check out our [Mexican Street Corn Pasta Salad](#) — a creamy, smoky twist that pairs perfectly with this Italian favorite.

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