

THREE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

Lifting the lid on three essential but simple ingredients that make or break a fresh filled pasta dish

Us Brits do love coating our pasta in sauce – and there are plenty of fantastic sauce recipes out there – but what few realise that you need little to elevate a home-prepared fresh filled pasta dish to restaurant-worthy levels (or how they do it back in Italy).

In fact, three of the simplest, most accessible ingredients can make the difference between a rather tasty meal and a mouth-watering, authentically Italian masterpiece: cheese, extra virgin olive oil and herbs.

These three ingredients are of some of the cornerstones of Italian cooking. Seemingly so simple, so basic that many home cooks may not give them a moment's extra thought – but within them lies a universe of possibilities. The key to how Italians use them is by pairing them with fresh filled pasta, which packs the flavour inside as opposed to dry varieties (which do require sauces to bring more flavour to the plate).

Knowing the subtle differences between varieties of these three crucial ingredients, and how each one harmonises is key, so La Famiglia Rana, Italy's favourite fresh filled pasta producer for over 55 years, has developed this simple set of tips on creating subtle perfection with flavour matches which will have you cooking like a born Italian in no time.

LA FAMIGLIA RANA'S TOP 3 'MAGIC' INGREDIENTS OF ITALIAN COOKING

EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

Not all extra virgin olive oils were created equal. Even at the top of the range (and any Italian will tell you they only use the finest), there is a huge variety in flavour, colour and spice depending on the climate, the earth where the olive trees grow, the olive variety used, and how it's pressed. And it always has to be extra virgin olive oil.

What to look for:

- *If you like strong flavours* look for extra virgin olive oils from Apulia/Sicily. These have a peppery taste that tickles the throat. This is a sign that the extra virgin olive oil is fresh from the press; as the extra virgin olive oil matures, the aromas grow milder.
- *If you like delicate flavours* and love herbs, seek out extra virgin olive oils from Liguria. These are delicate and mild because of the main variety grown there: tiny Taggiasca olives. They are a deep purple-black, and bursting with flavour. Taggiasca olives are naturally lower in levels of free acids which can make an oil taste bitter.
- *If you want a real rare gem:* Lake Garda. This extra virgin olive oil has a delicate, elegant flavour profile, and a light to medium aroma with notes of fresh grass, aromatic herbs, hay, artichoke, and a unique almond aftertaste. The olive trees grow in a very small area and produce a limited number of olives every year.

CHEESES

Not only do different cheeses have very different flavours and textures, which naturally lend themselves to certain dishes, but they taste better added in different ways suited to that texture: grated, shaved, torn or even gently folded in.

What to look for:

- *The crowd pleaser:* Parmigiano Reggiano. This king of traditional Italian cuisine is produced exclusively in the provinces of Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena and parts of Mantua and Bologna and the producers have to follow a strict, detailed protocol made by the Consortium of Parmigiano Reggiano. Parmigiano Reggiano has been guaranteed for over seventy years by the Consortium which examines each individual cheese and, following the Control's body inspection, fire-brands its seal of approval onto each cheese individually. High quality milk and local salt make the younger cheeses fragrant, salty yet delicate. As the months pass, the centre of the cheese takes on a more intense saltiness, but it never becomes spicy. A sprinkling of grated Parmigiano Reggiano with a little bit of extra virgin oil is the best pairing to season any La Famiglia Rana Tortelloni
- *The extra special occasion:* Burrata. This unctuous cheese has become somewhat of a celebrity in the last year or so, thanks to its unbeatable creaminess, and buttery, oozy filling. Simply tear into bite-size pieces and arrange over your just-cooked La Famiglia Rana Tortelloni dish, with extra virgin olive oil and some fresh soft herbs.
- *Versatility and a taste of history:* Ricotta Salata. This cheese has been produced in Italy since ancient Roman times (so you know it's been perfected over centuries!). Unlike regular Ricotta, which is soft enough to be eaten with a spoon, Ricotta Salata is salted, formed into a wheel and aged for several months. This makes the flavour a bit saltier. The texture remains creamy but firm enough to crumble, grate or even carefully slice. It's subtle enough to add to milder flavoured dishes but holds its own used over richer recipes as well. Delicious crumbled over la Famiglia Rana Aubergine Parmigiana Tortelloni seasoned with a bit of extra virgin oil.

HERBS

Britons love herbs just as much as Italians do, but when it comes to using them in fresh filled pasta dishes, there are some very simple tips:

What to look for:

- *The most Italian of all Italian flavours:* has to be basil – in particular Ligurian basil (few people realise Genovese basil is a DOP!). Grown in Liguria, this is a symbol not only of Italian cuisine, but also quality and simplicity itself. Always best used fresh rather than cooked, hand torn and added at the end to maximise flavour. It goes best with tomatoes but its heady aniseed taste is also great for cutting through creamy cheeses such as a Burrata.
- *Robust but delicate to balance stronger flavoured fillings:* marjoram – like a milder version of oregano it is very popular in the Italian Riviera. Its subtleties will elevate a fresh filled pasta with a punchier filling, such as La Famiglia Rana's Ragù Bolognese Tortelloni
- *Traditional but unexpected:* sage (especially popular in Tuscany and other parts of central and northern Italy) has a soft minty taste and is perfect in butter sauces. Its larger leaves can be deep-fried to yield a flavourful, crispy chip that can then be used as a garnish to season any La Famiglia Rana Tortelloni dish: in a few minutes, you'll have produced one of the most traditional pasta dishes in Italy.

HOW TO USE THEM? FIVE TOP TIPS:

1. Always use fine extra virgin olive oil for dressing a dish, not frying.
2. As a general rule, stronger flavours (whether cheese, extra virgin olive oil or herbs) match well with equally robust fillings, whilst the milder, finer flavours are best appreciated when paired with a delicate filling such as Spinach & Ricotta.
3. Softer herbs tend to work best added fresh to finish a dish (e.g. mint, basil). If a herb's leaves feel tougher or thicker, like sage or marjoram, it will create a more pleasant sensation to eat them cooked
4. Don't be shy – next time you're at a cheese counter ask to taste a cheese you never had before. If you're on holiday pick up a bottle of extra virgin olive oil from a different region. By trying new things you'll start to develop your own favourite combinations.

5. There's no wrong way! Trust the La Famiglia Rana Tortelloni filling to do the heavy lifting and use the Magic Three to elevate them to your own personal taste.

For more recipe ideas and to discover the full range of La Famiglia Rana products, which includes fresh filled tortelloni, pasta sauces and pan-fried gnocchi, visit: www.rana.co.uk

La Famiglia Rana products are available at Sainsbury's, Ocado, Morrisons and independent retailers. The Pan-Fried Gnocchi range is exclusively available at Sainsbury's. To find a specific store location visit www.rana.co.uk/store-locator.

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For more recipes, information or imagery, please contact La Famiglia Rana Press office on rana@cowpr.com or call 020 7234 9150

NOTES TO EDITORS

About La Famiglia Rana www.rana.co.uk

As our names suggests, La Famiglia Rana is a family run-and-owned company. We've been producing the finest fresh filled pasta since 1962. From humble beginnings when founder Giovanni Rana hand-made and personally delivered fresh tortelloni to friends and neighbors in Verona, we're now a globally recognised brand and we continue to uphold our same core values: using only the best ingredients and pushing boundaries to create the tastiest fresh filled pasta.