



## THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES

A FOOD BLOG

### **Penne alla Vodka** (from Cooks Illustrated)

You can never go wrong following a Cooks Illustrated recipe precisely. I, however, don't, in this case. Because I almost always make this after a day of traveling, I simplify it wherever possible. Instead of pureeing half of the tomatoes and dicing the rest, I simply stick a pair of kitchen shears in the tomato can and snip away. I don't separate the liquid and the tomatoes in order to measure a certain amount; I just pour all of the liquid in to the sauce. I like to use 2 shallots instead of half an onion. If I don't have cream, I use milk. If I don't have milk, I skip the dairy. If I don't have basil, I use parsley. If I don't have parsley, I skip the herbs or use dried. It's tomatoes, pasta, and alcohol; it isn't going to be bad.

1 (28-ounce) can whole tomatoes, drained, liquid reserved  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
½ small onion, minced (about ¼ cup)  
1 tablespoon tomato paste  
2 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 2 teaspoons)  
¼-½ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes  
table salt  
⅓ cup vodka  
½ heavy cream  
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh basil leaves  
fresh parmesan cheese, for serving

1. Puree half of the tomatoes in a food processor until smooth. Dice the remaining tomatoes into ½-inch pieces, discarding cores. Combine the pureed and diced tomatoes in a liquid measuring cup (you should have about 1⅓ cups). Add reserved tomato liquid to equal 2 cups.
2. Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium heat until shimmering. Add the onion and tomato paste and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are light golden around the edges, about 3 minutes. Add the garlic and pepper flakes; cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 30 seconds.
3. Stir in the tomatoes and ½ teaspoon salt. Remove the pan from the heat and add the vodka. Return the pan to medium-high heat and simmer briskly until the alcohol flavor is cooked off, 8 to 10 minutes; stir frequently and lower the heat to medium if the simmering becomes too vigorous. Stir in the cream and cook until hot, about 1 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, bring 4 quarts water to a boil in a large Dutch oven over high heat. Add 1 tablespoon salt and the pasta. Cook until just shy of al dente, then drain the pasta, reserving ¼ cup cooking water, and transfer the pasta back to the Dutch oven. Add the sauce to the pasta and toss over medium heat until the pasta absorbs some of the sauce, 1 to 2 minutes, adding reserved cooking water if sauce is too thick. Stir in the basil and adjust the seasoning with salt. Divide among pasta bowls and serve immediately, passing Parmesan separately.