Penne alla Vodka

Ingredients:



1/3 pound of pancetta, 3-4 sliced, diced
½ cup of sweet onion, finely diced
1 large clove of garlic, finely diced
1 Tablespoon of extra virgin olive oil
1/8 teaspoon of red pepper flake (1 dried pepper)
1 cup of vodka
1 35-ounce can of whole peeled Italian tomatoes
1 cup heavy whipping cream
1 Tablespoon of parsley, minced
1 pound of penne pasta
1 pound of Italian sausage links (about 5), optional

Instructions:

In a large pan add the pancetta and a bit of olive oil. Over medium-high heat, render the fat from the pancetta and cook until crisp. Add onion and cook until soft or slightly browned. Add garlic and crushed red pepper, cooking for an additional minute or two. Reduce heat to medium and add vodka. Use caution if doing this over an opened flame as alcohol can easily ignite. Continue cooking until liquid is reduced by half.

In a blender, add tomatoes and blend until smooth. Reduce heat to medium-low, add tomatoes to the pan, stir, and simmer until gently bubbling. Cook for 15 minutes and then add cream. Return to a gently simmer. Sauce is now ready. Once pasta is cooked and drained, mix with sauce (in the pan or a serving bowl), and garnish with parsley.

Penne alla vodka is one of the few pasta dishes that should be swimming in sauce, so it's best to serve with garlic bread.

Optional: Italian sausage can be cooked ahead of time, set aside, and added to sauce to be reheated prior to adding the cream. To make smaller links, simply twist each link in half and cut prior to cooking (see photo). Meatballs also make a fine alternative.

Serves 4-5