

Buttered Miso Linguine with Leeks

Excerpted from Ruby Tandoh's Cook As You Are
Serves 4

Salt

4 small to medium leeks

6 tablespoons (85g) salted or unsalted butter

14 ounces linguine

4 tablespoons crème fraîche or sour cream

1 ½ tablespoons white miso

½ - 1 teaspoon chili flakes or ½ teaspoon chili powder, to taste

Lots of freshly ground black pepper

Put a large pot of salted water on the stovetop over a high heat, bringing the water to a boil.

While the water heats, trim your leeks: remove the wiry root end and the very top, where the leaves fade to a deep green and are coarser and tougher than the white and lighter green parts. (*MB note: save these in a bag, in the freezer, for stock.*) Halve the remaining leek stalk, rinsing well if you see dirt, and cut into finger-width slices.

In a separate medium or large pot, heat the butter over a medium heat, then add the chopped leeks and a pinch of salt. It will look like a lot of butter, but it's vital to this dish so have faith. Stir everything to combine, then put a lid on the pan and let the leeks sweat for 15 minutes, stirring regularly and turning down the heat if they're beginning to brown or stick. When the leek is ready, it should be tender, yielding and slippery. Turn off the heat.

By this point, your water should be boiling. Add the pasta to it and cook according to the instructions on the package. I'd err toward the lowest end of the recommended cooking time—especially in a creamy sauce like this, it's important that pasta isn't too soft. As Marcella Hazan puts it, when overcooked, "pasta becomes leaden, and it loses its buoyancy and its ability to deliver briskly the flavors of its sauce." Once cooked, drain the pasta but reserve a couple of tablespoons of the cooking water.

Add the drained pasta to the pot with the leeks, then add the reserved cooking water, the crème fraîche or sour cream, white miso, chile flakes and black pepper. Stir everything together over a very low heat, stopping as soon as it's mixed. Turn off the heat and check the seasoning, adding salt if necessary, then serve straightaway.

Variations and substitutions

If you can't eat gluten, gluten-free pasta can be found in most supermarkets. The linguine can of course be swapped for any other long pasta, such as spaghetti, tagliatelle or pappardelle.

I use white miso, or shiro miso,, for this dish which is delicate but deeply savory. If you don't have any miso, you can just leave this out! Alternatives to the miso and chili seasoning include 1 tablespoon Dijon or wholegrain mustard, or a generous pinch of nutmeg and 1 ½ teaspoons paprika.