



ARTICLE / FEATURED RECIPE

Yummly Essentials: Hail Mary Pasta

Learn how to turn a handful of ingredients into an easy weeknight recipe that's ready in the time it takes to cook the pasta



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Photographs by Olga Ivanova

These days I'm a [meal-planning pro](#), but I wasn't always. Way back when, I considered myself more of a pantser — I cooked by the seat of my pants, no planning ahead, no specific recipe in mind. Over time, I found that certain pantser dinners turned into actual recipes, or more accurately, formulas: flexible pairings of ingredients and techniques that let me use what I have on hand to produce predictably delicious results. My all-time favorite pantser meal is what I call Hail Mary Pasta.

Like a Hail Mary pass in football, when the clock is running out and the quarterback has

no choice but to hurl the ball towards the end zone and hope for the best, Hail Mary Pasta was born out of desperation.

Early one evening when my now-teenage son was a toddler, my husband texted that they were on the way home from the playground. Kiddo was starving. I hadn't yet started cooking dinner or even considered what to make, so into the kitchen I flew. I put on a large pot of salted water to boil (even when I don't know what else will go into the pot, I start there — hot, salted water can be used to cook so many things) and threw open the fridge. Inside, I spotted a pint of grape tomatoes, just starting to wrinkle. A sad, lonely zucchini. *I can make something with this.*

I cranked up the oven and put the vegetables on a sheet pan with thinly sliced garlic and a healthy glug of olive oil. By the time the pasta was ready, the grape tomatoes had burst and released their juices, the zucchini had softened and begun to caramelize, and the garlic was aromatic and golden.

The dish wasn't quite ready when my guys got home, but close enough. In the years since, Hail Mary Pasta has become a go-to in my kitchen. As long as I've got cherry or grape tomatoes, olive oil, garlic, and pasta, I've got dinner. And now, so do you.

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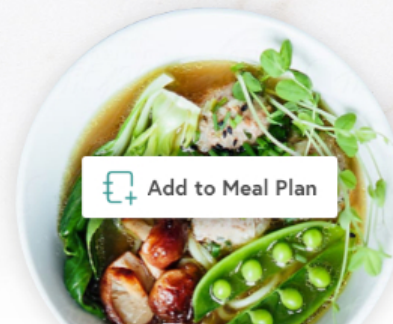
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Ingredients for Hail Mary Pasta



In its most basic form, this dish only needs four ingredients: pasta, small tomatoes, garlic, and olive oil. I almost always add a second (or third) vegetable, such as zucchini, and sprinkle a little freshly grated Parmesan or Pecorino on top at the end — and if I've got fresh herbs like basil on hand, I'll add some of them, too. Of course, salt and freshly ground pepper are a given.



How to make Hail Mary Pasta





The best pantsier recipes require very few essential steps. This one has just three:

1. Cook some pasta.
2. While that's going, roast cherry tomatoes, garlic, and whatever other vegetable you like in a *very* hot oven.
3. When the pasta is done, the veggies should be, too. Combine and serve.

Tips for customizing Hail Mary Pasta

What have you got in the crisper? Odds are, it'll work in this recipe. The only vegetables you absolutely need are garlic and tomatoes. I recommend cherry or grape tomatoes because when they burst, they release the perfect amount of juice, but the color is up to you. (In summer, Sungold cherry tomatoes from the farmer's market or your garden make a particularly sweet sauce, if that's your thing.) Once you've got your garlic and tomatoes, you can keep it simple with nothing else added, or choose another vegetable or two — just make sure you cut them small enough to roast quickly in a hot oven.

Possibilities include:

- Asparagus
- Bell peppers
- Broccoli or broccolini
- Cauliflower
- Eggplant
- Fennel
- Fresh or frozen corn kernels
- Leafy greens like spinach, chard, or kale
- Mushrooms
- Red onion or shallots
- Summer squash

Add fresh herbs if you've got 'em:

- Basil
- Dill

- Oregano
- Parsley
- Rosemary (finely chopped)
- Tarragon
- Thyme

You can have fun with cheese, too, which helps make the dish more substantial:

- Grated Parmesan, pecorino, or asiago
- Cubed fresh mozzarella
- Crumbled feta

And you can add a little something extra:

- Crushed red pepper flakes
- Pine nuts or slivered almonds
- Breadcrumbs browned in olive oil
- Lemon juice or zest

Get the Hail Mary Pasta recipe

Have you turned on the oven and cranked up the heat on that pot of pasta water? Let's get cooking!



Hail Mary Pasta





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