

## Pasta Salad with Homemade Dressing: Colorful, Zesty & Easy Side Dish

Pasta Salad with Homemade Dressing: Your Colorful, Zesty Side Dish Superstar!



**TIME**  
**30 min**

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**ChefManiac**

### INGREDIENTS

12 oz rotini or fusilli pasta (or other short, sturdy pasta shape)

1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved

1 cucumber, diced (English or Persian cucumber recommended)

$\frac{1}{8}$  red onion, thinly sliced

$\frac{1}{4}$  cup black olives, sliced (Kalamata or regular black olives)

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup cubed cheddar or mozzarella cheese

$\frac{1}{4}$  cup chopped fresh parsley

Salt and pepper to taste (for the finished salad)

$\frac{1}{3}$  cup olive oil (extra virgin, good quality)

3 tablespoons red wine vinegar

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

1 garlic clove, minced

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon dried oregano

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon dried basil

$\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (optional, for a subtle kick)

1 teaspoon honey or maple syrup

Salt and pepper to taste (for the dressing)

Swaps and Notes:

Pasta Shape: Rotini or fusilli are great because their spirals catch the dressing and small pieces of veggies. Penne, farfalle (bowties), or elbow macaroni also work.

**Vegetables:** Use any combination of crisp, fresh vegetables you love. Diced bell peppers, corn kernels, or blanched green beans would also be great.

**Olives:** Black olives are common, but briny Kalamata olives would add more depth.

**Cheese:** Cubed cheddar or mozzarella are classic. Provolone or a mixed Italian blend would also be delicious.

**Fresh Parsley:** Adds a bright, fresh herbaceous note. Fresh dill or mint could also be lovely additions.

**Red Wine Vinegar:** Essential for the tangy base of the dressing. White wine vinegar can be used for a milder tang.

**Dijon Mustard:** Helps emulsify the dressing and adds a subtle sharpness.

**Garlic:** Freshly minced garlic provides the best flavor for the dressing.

**Honey/Maple Syrup:** Balances the tanginess of the vinegar. Adjust to your desired sweetness.

**Crushed Red Pepper Flakes:** Adds a hint of warmth. Omit if you prefer no heat.

**Directions:**

**Cook & Chill Pasta:** Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Cook the rotini or fusilli pasta according to package instructions until al dente (tender but still firm to the bite). Drain the pasta well, then rinse it thoroughly under cold water to stop the cooking process and prevent stickiness. This also helps cool the pasta quickly.

**Combine Salad Ingredients:** In a very large bowl, combine the cooled pasta with the halved cherry tomatoes, diced cucumber, thinly sliced red onion, sliced black olives, cubed cheddar or mozzarella cheese, and chopped fresh parsley. Give them a gentle toss to mix.

**Whisk Homemade Dressing:** In a separate small bowl or a jar with a tight-fitting lid, whisk together all the dressing ingredients: olive oil, red wine vinegar, Dijon mustard, minced garlic, dried oregano, dried basil, crushed red pepper flakes (if using), honey or maple syrup, salt, and black pepper. Whisk vigorously (or shake the jar) until the dressing is well combined and emulsified.

**Dress & Toss Salad:** Pour the prepared dressing evenly over the salad ingredients in the large bowl. Toss gently but thoroughly to coat everything well, ensuring all the ingredients are evenly coated with the flavorful dressing. Adjust salt and pepper to taste in the finished salad.

**Chill & Serve:** Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and chill the salad in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes (or up to several hours) before serving for best flavor. This allows all the flavors to meld

and deepen. Serve chilled.

Tips for Success:

## DIRECTIONS

1. Making this : Pasta Salad with Homemade Dressing is simple, with straightforward steps for cooking and assembling!
2. Cook & : Chill Pasta: Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Cook the rotini or fusilli pasta according to package instructions until al dente (tender but still firm to the bite). Drain the pasta well, then rinse it thoroughly under cold water to stop the cooking process and prevent stickiness. This also helps cool the pasta quickly.
3. Combine : Salad Ingredients: In a very large bowl, combine the cooled pasta with the halved cherry tomatoes, diced cucumber, thinly sliced red onion, sliced black olives, cubed cheddar or mozzarella cheese, and chopped fresh parsley. Give them a gentle toss to mix.
4. Whisk : Homemade Dressing: In a separate small bowl or a jar with a tight-fitting lid, whisk together all the dressing ingredients: olive oil, red wine vinegar, Dijon mustard, minced garlic, dried oregano, dried basil, crushed red pepper flakes (if using), honey or maple syrup, salt, and black pepper. Whisk vigorously (or shake the jar) until the dressing is well combined and emulsified.
5. Dress & : Toss Salad: Pour the prepared dressing evenly over the salad ingredients in the large bowl. Toss gently but thoroughly to coat everything well, ensuring all the ingredients are evenly coated with the flavorful dressing. Adjust salt and pepper to taste in the finished salad.
6. Chill & : Serve: Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and chill the salad in the refrigerator for at least 30

minutes (or up to several hours) before serving for best flavor. This allows all the flavors to meld and deepen. Serve chilled.

7. **Tips for Success: Al Dente Pasta:** Cook the pasta just until al dente. Overcooked pasta will become mushy in the salad.
8. **Rinse with : Cold Water:** Rinsing the pasta thoroughly under cold water is crucial for pasta salad. It stops the cooking, removes excess starch (preventing stickiness), and cools the pasta so it doesn't absorb too much dressing immediately.
9. **Finely : Chop Red Onion:** Thinly slicing or finely chopping the red onion ensures its flavor isn't overpowering.
10. **Taste and : Adjust Dressing:** Always taste your dressing before adding it to the salad. Adjust sweetness, tartness, or saltiness as needed.
11. **Chill : Time is Key:** The chilling period allows the flavors to truly meld and develop, making the salad even more delicious.
12. **Generous : Dressing:** Don't be shy with the dressing! It should generously coat all the ingredients.
13. **Serving Suggestions and Pairings:** This Pasta Salad with Homemade Dressing is an incredibly versatile and refreshing side dish for nearly any meal, especially during warm weather. It's perfect for summer barbecues, potlucks, picnics, family gatherings, or as a light lunch. It pairs wonderfully with grilled chicken, burgers, hot dogs, or roasted meats. For other vibrant and healthy salad options, you might also enjoy my Easy Quinoa Salad or my colorful Best Cowboy Caviar.
14. **Storage and Leftover Tips:** Store any leftover Pasta Salad with Homemade Dressing in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3-4 days. The pasta will continue to absorb the dressing, so you might want to add a tiny splash more olive oil or a squeeze of lemon juice to refresh it before serving leftovers.
15. **More Recipes You Will Love:** If you loved the fresh flavors and easy preparation of this pasta salad, here are a few more fantastic savory and refreshing recipes that I think you'll absolutely love:
16. For another light and tangy salad that's perfect for summer, check out my [A Light, Tangy Chicken Salad I Actually Crave](#) (and [There's No Mayo in Sight!](#)).
17. For a vibrant and refreshing layered dip, my [Mediterranean Garden Layer Dip](#) is a fantastic choice.
18. If you're a fan of quick and tasty veggie snacks, my [Vegan Sweet Chili Edamame](#) are a must-try.
19. And for a refreshing fruit salad perfect for hot days, don't miss my [Peach Watermelon Salad](#).
20. **Final Thoughts:** This Pasta Salad with Homemade Dressing is a true summertime essential - simple to make, incredibly flavorful, and perfectly refreshing. It's guaranteed to be a hit wherever you bring it. Give it a toss, and enjoy this colorful, zesty delight!
21. What's your go-to ingredient to add a special touch to your pasta salads? Share your ideas and feedback in the comments below, and don't forget to follow Chef

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**More recipes:** [ChefManiac.com](https://chefmaniac.com)

Original recipe: <https://chefmaniac.com/pasta-salad-with-homemade-dressing-colorful-zesty-easy-side-dish/>