

## Magda Gagliano's Pasta con Sarde

Serves: 8

5 tablespoons olive oil, plus more for finishing  
1 large fennel head (cut in small dice ½-inch) and fronds (reserve the leaves)  
1 medium yellow onion, cut in small dice ½-inch  
1 tablespoon tomato paste  
3 tablespoons golden raisins  
1 teaspoon fennel pollen  
1 pound penne  
8 large fresh sardines, cleaned, scaled and deboned  
1 cup breadcrumbs, preferably homemade  
¼ cup toasted pine nuts  
salt and pepper to taste

Place a stock/pasta pot on high heat and bring to a boil. Add a healthy amount of salt -- you want the water to almost taste like the sea.

While water is reaching boiling point, heat 3 tablespoons of olive oil in a large sauté pan. Add diced fennel head and onion, and sauté until soft and translucent but not browned, approximately 5 minutes. Mix in tomato paste and stir until vegetables are coated, approximately 2 minutes. Next add raisins and let them soften from the heat and absorb some of the juices from the sautéed vegetables. Sprinkle fennel pollen and allow heat to release the delicate aroma.

Add penne to boiling salted water and cook for 8 -10 minutes or until perfectly al dente.

Next, cut the cleaned and deboned sardines into 1-inch pieces. Add to sauté pan with onions and fennel, and cook for 1-2 minutes until fish is just cooked through. You do not want to overcook it, as the heat from the pasta will continue to cook the sardines.

In a separate small pan, add remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil. When oil is heated, add breadcrumbs and toast until golden brown. Be careful not to burn the breadcrumbs. You just want to get a nice golden color on them. Season with salt and pepper and set aside to cool.

By now the pasta should be perfectly cooked *al dente*. Toss pasta into sauté pan with sardines and fennel. Sprinkle toasted pine nuts. This is not a wet sauce but if it appears a bit too dry, then add a ladle of pasta cooking water. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Place pasta in serving bowl and sprinkle with a handful of fresh fennel frond leaves and toasted breadcrumbs. Drizzle with good olive oil and serve!