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Mafaldine con Peperoni e Prosciutto

Dried ribbon pasta with red bell peppers and prosciutto

Whenever I shop at a specialty-food store or an Italian deli, I check the shelves for unfamiliar dried pasta shapes. That's how I found mafaldine, which are 1/2-inch-wide ribbons of pasta with ruffled edges. The broader mafalde, which look like lasagne noodles with rippled edges, are perhaps better known, but narrower mafaldine are easier to twirl around softened sweet bell peppers. Delverde, the prominent Italian pasta manufacturer, makes mafaldine. Ask your merchant to order them, or substitute dried linguine.

You'll need at least a 12-inch skillet to handle all these peppers. I don't roast and peel the peppers first because I don't want to lose a drop of their flavorful juices. I don't mind the paper-thin skins, and the juices contribute to a luscious sauce.

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 large cloves garlic, minced
- 5 large red bell peppers, seeds and ribs removed, then sliced 1/4 inch wide
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dried oregano
- Salt
- 3 to 4 ounces prosciutto, minced
- 1 pound mafaldine, linguine, or spaghetti
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons chopped Italian (flat-leaf) parsley

In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over moderate heat. Add the garlic and cook briefly to release its fragrance. Add the bell peppers and oregano, crushing the herb between your fingers. Season with salt to taste. Cover and reduce the heat to moderately low. Cook gently, stirring occasionally, until the peppers are tender but not mushy, 30 to 40 minutes. Stir in the prosciutto and a few tablespoons of water to loosen the pan juices, then remove from the heat.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the pasta and cook until al dente. Set aside 1 cup of the pasta water, then drain the pasta and return it to the warm pot over low heat. Add the sauce, butter, and parsley and toss until the butter melts, moistening with some of the reserved pasta water as needed. Serve immediately in warm bowls.

Serves 4 to 6