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Pasta Salad with Roasted Tomatoes, Mozzarella, and Oil-Cured Olives

Serves 8

Orecchiette, or “little ears,” pasta makes a fast and delicious summer salad. Both the roasted and sweet fresh tomatoes and the olives get caught in the hollows of the pasta and give the dish an intense flavor. This is a great picnic or cookout dish, as it can be made several hours ahead.

3/4 pound plum tomatoes, cored and halved
1/2 cup olive oil
1/4 cup red wine vinegar
1 tablespoon capers
1 garlic clove, minced
1 pound orecchiette
2 cups chopped ripe tomatoes (about 3/4 pound)
2-1/2 cups dice fresh mozzarella cheese (about 1/2 pound)
1 cup tightly packed fresh basil leaves, thinly sliced
1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1/2 cup pitted oil-cured black olives, minced
Sea Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 300°F.
2. Place the halved tomatoes on an oiled baking sheet and drizzle with 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. Bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until the tomatoes have softened and become lightly browned. Remove from the oven and cool slightly.
3. Place the remaining 6 tablespoons of olive oil, the vinegar, capers, garlic, and roasted tomatoes in a food processor and pulse 3 or 4 times until the tomatoes are coarsely chopped. Place the mixture in a small bowl and set aside.
4. Cook the pasta in a large pot of boiling salted water, stirring occasionally until *al dente*. Drain the pasta and transfer it to a large serving bowl. Stir the roasted tomato mixture into the hot pasta. Cool the dish completely, stirring occasionally to blend the flavors.
5. Gently stir in the chopped fresh tomatoes, mozzarella, basil, Parmesan, and olives. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Cover and chill for up to 6 hours. Allow to come to room temperature before serving.