



Spaghetti alla Chitarra (Abruzzo)

In the rugged heart of Abruzzo, where the Apennines roll into the Adriatic, the villages are places of stone houses, church bells, and wood smoke. Here, pasta is not a product but a ritual—one made slowly, by hand, with flour, eggs, and patience.

The region's signature pasta, *spaghetti alla chitarra*, takes its name from the wooden tool once used to cut it—a *chitarra*, meaning "guitar." Thin strings stretched across a wooden frame slice the pasta into square-edged strands when pressed through with a rolling pin. But even without the tool, the dough can be hand-cut into simple ribbons, a technique passed from grandparent to grandchild.

Traditionally served with a rich tomato sauce and *polpettine*—tiny meatballs made from leftover meat or bread crumbs. This dish represents the spirit of Abruzzese cooking: *nothing fancy, nothing wasted, everything filled with care.*

On winter Sundays, families gather around big wooden tables to roll the dough, laugh, and wait for the sauce to simmer.

Recipe— Spaghetti alla Chitarra

Serves 4

Ingredients

For the pasta—

300 g / 10 oz / 1¼ cup

3 large

1 pinch

all-purpose flour, or Italian “00” flour

eggs

salt

For the sauce—

2 Tbsp

1 small

1 clove

400 g / 14 oz

to taste

a few

olive oil

onion, finely diced

garlic, crushed

peeled tomatoes, canned (or tomato passata)

salt & pepper

basil leaves, fresh

For the tiny meatballs (*polpettine*)—

150 g / 5.3 oz

1 slice

1 Tbsp

1 large

to taste

olive oil for frying

minced beef (or a mix of beef & pork)

bread— soaked in milk & squeezed dry

Parmigiano Reggiano, grated

egg

salt & pepper

Recipe— Spaghetti alla Chitarra, cont.

Method

- [1] **Prepare the pasta**— place the flour on a wooden board, make a well in the center, and crack in the eggs with a pinch of salt. Gradually mix the flour into the eggs with a fork, then knead until smooth and elastic (about 8–10 minutes). Wrap in a cloth & let it rest for 30 minutes.
- [2] **Roll & cut**— roll the dough into a thin sheet (about 2 mm / 1/8 in). If you don't have a *chitarra*, use a sharp knife to cut into spaghetti-like strands. Dust lightly with flour to prevent sticking.
- [3] **Make the sauce**— heat olive oil in a pan, add onion & garlic, sauté gently until translucent. Add tomatoes, salt, pepper, & basil. Simmer on low heat for about 30 minutes.
- [4] **Form the meatballs**— combine all *polpettine* ingredients in a bowl and roll into tiny balls, no larger than marbles. Fry in a pan with a drizzle of olive oil until golden, then transfer into the simmering tomato sauce to finish cooking for 10 minutes.
- [5] **Cook the pasta**— boil in salted water for 2–3 minutes, until *al dente*. Drain & toss directly into the sauce.
- [6] **Serve immediately**— topped with extra *Parmigiano* and a drizzle of olive oil.

Tips & Variations

- **No chitarra?** Roll the dough thin and cut with a knife— the pasta's charm lies in its rustic edges and handmade feel.
- **Vegetarian?** Replace the beef with a plant based alternative, or shift the *polpettine* to a creamy tomato and ricotta sauce—
 - [a] Prepare the tomato sauce as above.
 - [b] Once thickened, remove from the heat and stir in 150 g / 5.3 oz fresh ricotta & 40 g / 1.4 oz grated *Parmigiano*.
 - [c] Toss the cooked pasta into the sauce, coating well. The ricotta melts slightly, creating a velvety texture that clings to every strand— light, comforting, and beautifully Abruzzese.
- **Extra depth?** Add a splash of red wine to the tomato sauce before simmering, or a few chili flakes for warmth.