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This recipe is part of a Lent 2025 series where National Catholic Reporter staff will share some of their favorite meatless meals. Sign up for the EarthBeat Reflections email newsletter to receive a recipe in your inbox each Friday of Lent this year.

One of the "four horsemen" of Roman pasta, cacio e pepe only has three ingredients, but can provide a unique challenge given how quickly it comes together. But with the right pasta, high-quality ingredients and a little patience, you can make this delicious dish in less than 30 minutes.

John's cacio e pepe

Servings — about 3

Time — 30 minutes

Ingredients

- 1.5 teaspoons of black pepper
- 2.5 cups of finely grated pecorino romano cheese
- 1 box of bucatini (the starchiest you can find)
- a dash of salt for the pasta water

Instructions

1. Fill a pot about 60% of the way with water. Add a dash of salt. Bring the water to a boil.
2. While waiting on the water to boil, prepare your ingredients. Grind fresh peppercorns coarsely with a mortar and pestle. Grate the cheese. Set both aside.
3. Once the water is boiling, add the bucatini to the water. Cook for 2-3 minutes less than the time recommended on the box.
4. While the pasta is cooking, put the ground pepper into a large saucepan over medium heat. Toast the pepper for no longer than 60 seconds. Once the pepper becomes aromatic, reduce the heat to low and add a ladle of pasta water to the pan. The entire bottom should be coated in a thin layer of pepper and pasta water.
5. Put the grated cheese in a heat-safe bowl. Add a small ladle of hot pasta water. Stir the mixture with a fork until it forms a loose paste.

6. Remove the pasta from the heat after the specified amount of time. Using tongs, transfer the pasta to the pan with the pepper water. Do not drain the pasta water, you will need it later.
7. Finish the pasta in the pan on medium heat. Periodically stir with tongs and add pasta water as needed.
8. Remove the pasta from the heat once it is al dente. Wait 30 seconds, then quickly stir in the pecorino mixture until a creamy sauce forms.
9. Serve and eat immediately!

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