

Rigatoni With Guanciale and Caramelized Onions

½ pound guanciale
4 medium onions
¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
¾ cup fresh breadcrumbs
½ cup grated Pecorino Romano, plus extra for the table
Pinch baking soda
½ teaspoon sugar
Pinch of peperoncino
1 pound rigatoni
Salt and black pepper to taste

Remove any rind from the guanciale, and cut into small dice. Heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a large skillet over low heat. Add the guanciale, and stir frequently until most of the fat is rendered (about 10 minutes). If the guanciale has not yet browned and crisped, turn up the heat for a couple minutes until it does. Remove with a slotted spoon to a side dish.

Cut the onions in half through the root. Slice very thinly. Over very low heat, add the pinch of peperoncino to the rendered guanciale oil in the skillet, then stir in the sliced onions. Add the pinch of baking soda and the ½ teaspoon of sugar. Cook the onions slowly for 10-15 minutes until very soft. Add a bit of salt to taste. Turn up the heat slightly and stir constantly until the onions develop a golden caramel color. Return the guanciale to the skillet with the onions and set aside off the heat.

In a small skillet, heat ¼ cup of olive oil. Add the fresh breadcrumbs to the hot oil and stir constantly over medium-low heat until the breadcrumbs are browned and crisped. Grate ½ cup of Pecorino Romano and set aside.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil with some salt. When it comes to a rolling boil, add the pound of rigatoni, stirring frequently for about 9-10 minutes, just short of the al dente stage. Just before the pasta is done, ladle out at least 1 cup of the pasta water.

Reheat the guanciale and onions gently. Add about ¼ cup of the pasta water stirring until it becomes a creamy sauce. Drain the pasta and add it to the guanciale and onions. Stir in about ½ cup or more of the pasta water and cook for a minute or two to finish cooking the pasta and to coat it with the sauce. Grind black pepper into the pasta to taste.

In the meantime, gently reheat the breadcrumbs. Turn off the heat under the pasta and the breadcrumbs. Off the heat, stir in ½ cup of the Pecorino Romano and blend until the cheese has melted and the pasta is well coated.

Dish out the pasta into bowls, and top each off with a generous portion of toasted breadcrumbs. Grate more cheese over each bowl at the table.