

SpaghettiOs with a PhD (*Pantry Heirloom Dinner*)

Serves 4–6

They'll never know what it was like to nap in the back window of a car while your dad smoked Marlboros with the A/C on low. To eat raw cookie dough straight from the tube and wash it down with Tang. To play outside until the streetlights came on and the mosquitoes carried you halfway home.

We drank from garden hoses, licked the beaters clean, and somehow survived a decade when metal playgrounds could sear your thighs and every neighbor owned an above-ground pool held together by faith and duct tape.

They'll never know what it meant to be a kid who understood the responsibilities of a self-caretaker and still managed to stay a child. But when they sit at your table, they'll taste what freedom used to be — unfiltered, unscheduled, and just a little reckless — the way life, and soup, were meant to be.

It's memorable from the first bite and the first grade.

Ingredients

Soup

2 tablespoons olive oil
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
1 small yellow onion, diced
4 garlic cloves, minced
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 teaspoon white miso paste
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon red pepper flakes (*or $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon for mild*)
1 teaspoon dried oregano
2 to 2½ cups passata (16–20 ounces)
6 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable stock
1 Parmesan rind (*optional but encouraged*)
2 red bell peppers, sliced
2 medium carrots, thinly sliced
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fresh basil leaves, packed
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
2 cups small pasta rings (*anellini or ditalini*)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy cream
1 to 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice, or to taste
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for serving
Freshly cracked black pepper, to taste
Fresh parsley or chives, for garnish

Garlic Butter

1 stick (8 tablespoons) unsalted butter, softened to room temperature
2 garlic cloves, grated not minced

3 tablespoons very finely grated Parmesan (*do not use powder*)
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 teaspoon white miso paste
½ teaspoon Italian seasoning
¼ teaspoon smoked paprika
Tiny pinch red pepper flakes (*optional*)
1 tablespoon finely minced parsley
¼ teaspoon kosher salt (*taste after mixing—miso + Parmesan and before add salt*)
Freshly cracked black pepper, to taste

1. **To make the soup:** Preheat the oven to 425°F. Toss the carrots and red bell peppers with olive oil, salt, and pepper on a parchment-lined sheet pan. Roast for 12 to 15 minutes, until softened with lightly caramelized edges.
2. In a Dutch oven, melt the olive oil and butter over medium heat. Add the onion and a pinch of salt. Cook 6 to 8 minutes, stirring often, until softened and lightly golden. Add the garlic and cook 30 seconds. Stir in the tomato paste, miso, smoked paprika, oregano, and crushed red pepper flakes. Cook 2 to 3 minutes, stirring constantly, until the tomato paste deepens slightly.
3. Pour in the passata and stock, then add the Parmesan rind. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook uncovered for 15 minutes. Remove the rind. Add the roasted vegetables and basil to the pot. Transfer to a blender and blend until completely smooth, silky, and glossy. Return the blended soup to the pot.
4. Stir in the heavy cream, Parmesan, lemon juice, and black pepper. Taste and adjust seasoning as needed. Keep warm over low heat.
5. To cook the pasta separately, bring a pot of well-salted water to a boil. Cook 2 cups dry anellini, ditalini, or mini pasta rings until al dente. Drain and toss lightly with olive oil to prevent sticking. *Do not cook pasta in the soup—cooking it separately keeps the broth silky and prevents over-thickening.*
6. To serve, spoon pasta into bowls, ladle hot soup over, and finish with a slice or spoonful of garlic Parmesan butter. Top with parsley or chives if desired.
7. **To make the garlic butter:** Mash all ingredients together until creamy and smooth. Keeps up to 5 days refrigerated, or 2 months frozen. Spread on bread and broil 2 to 3 minutes; stir 1 teaspoon into a hot bowl of soup; melt over pasta; or finish roasted vegetables, steaks, or potatoes.

Serving Note:

This soup is exceptional on its own, but it becomes unforgettable with a side of toasted bread spread with my Parmesan Garlic Butter. You can also stir a teaspoon or two of the butter directly into your bowl — it melts instantly, adding richness, depth, and a velvety finish that takes the flavor to another level.

Storage

Refrigerate: Cool completely, then store in an airtight container for up to 4 days.

Reheat: Warm gently on the stovetop over medium-low heat, adding a splash of broth or water to loosen if needed. Add pasta to bowls just before serving.

Freeze: Freeze soup before adding cream and Parmesan for up to 2 months. Stir in cream and cheese only after reheating. Do not freeze pasta.