

Snap Pea, Asparagus, and Ricotta Pashtida with Cheesy Breadcrumbs



4 to 6 servings

1 cup panko or homemade breadcrumbs
Olive oil
2/3 cup grated parmesan cheese, divided
6 oz snap peas & 6 oz asparagus*
8 oz penne, farfalle, or other short pasta
1 egg
8 oz ricotta (whole milk ricotta works best)
4 oz crème fraiche or labne
1 tablespoon butter
Salt & white or black pepper
2 lemons (you'll use zest only)

Make cheesy breadcrumbs. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Moisten crumbs well with olive oil and spread in sheet pan. Toast until golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Stir often to prevent burning. When cool, stir in cheese. If you prefer, skip this step, and use only cheese to top your casserole.

Butter 8 x 8 baking dish.

Unzip snap peas. Cut crosswise in small pieces. Snap off woody ends of asparagus. Cut spears crosswise into small pieces.

Cook peas and asparagus in rapidly boiling salted water for 2 minutes. Remove vegetables from water. Dump water and ice over them to stop cooking process. (Pro tip: Use same pot of water to cook pasta. The vegetable water adds flavor and there will be one less pot to wash.)

Cook pasta and drain (leave a little pasta water clinging to noodles).

Meanwhile, whisk egg in large bowl. Stir in ricotta, crème fraiche, parmesan, a little salt, and pepper. Mix in peas, asparagus, and pasta until everything is lusciously coated. Zest 1 lemon into bowl and stir. I like to use a microplane here to get teeny pieces of zest throughout casserole. (Pro tip: zest citrus over other ingredients to catch the spray of oils as you work.)

Pour into baking dish. Top with crumbs or parmesan. (Dish can be made ahead to this point early in day and refrigerated. Bake at 350 degrees until bubbling and edges of noodles are crisped, about 30 minutes (10 minutes more for a cold casserole. Zest 2nd lemon over hot casserole to perfume it further. (Pro-tip: use a 5-hole zester for long curls of zest to finish dish prettily.)

*Vegetable Substitutions: 12 oz asparagus, 12 oz snap peas, 2 cups fresh or frozen English peas, or other quick-cooking vegetable, such as spinach, or chopped broccoli or cauliflower florets.
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