

Chicken, Spinach & Fennel Seed

Mezze Maniche

**Gather
& Feast**

By Ashley Alexander

Here's a weeknight dinner that feels a little fancy, comes together quickly, and tastes absolutely delicious. If you've tried cavolo nero (Tuscan kale) pasta sauces and found them a bit too verdant or earthy, but love the idea of a lush green sauce, this recipe is for you. It's hearty yet fresh, easy enough for a Tuesday night, and just special enough for when friends or family drop by. All you need is a handful of ingredients, a few clever techniques, one big pan, and a generous sprinkle of Parmigiano to finish. You're going to love it.

SERVES 4 | **PREP TIME** 10 minutes | **COOK TIME** 20 minutes | **TOTAL TIME** 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- 300g baby spinach
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon fennel seeds, lightly crushed in a mortar and pestle or left whole
- 500g chicken mince
- 6 cloves garlic - 1 whole, 5 finely grated or crushed
- 60g fresh Parmigiano Reggiano, finely grated, plus a little extra for serving
- 400g mezze maniche, rigatoni, or another short pasta of your choice

METHOD

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to the boil.
2. Add the spinach and blanch for about 1 minute, until vibrant green. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the spinach to a bowl, along with 1 cup of the cooking water. Set aside to cool slightly. (If your blender can't handle hot liquids, pop the spinach and water into the freezer to cool quickly.)
3. Bring the spinach water back to a boil and add the pasta. Cook for 3 minutes less than the time stated on the packet.
4. Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large deep frypan over high heat. Add the fennel seeds and chicken mince, season generously with salt, and cook for 1–2 minutes. Add the 5 cloves of crushed or grated garlic and continue cooking until the chicken is golden and cooked through.
5. While the chicken and pasta are cooking, blend the spinach, spinach water, 2 tablespoons olive oil, the whole garlic clove, and lemon zest until smooth. Pour this mixture into the chicken, reduce the heat to medium-low, and stir, scraping up the golden bits from the bottom of the pan for extra flavour.
6. Once the pasta is ready, use a slotted spoon to transfer it directly into the chicken and spinach sauce. Toss everything together over high heat for a minute or two, adding splashes of pasta water as needed to create a silky, loose sauce. Cook until the pasta is al dente.

7. Remove from the heat, stir through the Parmigiano Reggiano, and check for seasoning. If the sauce thickens too much, loosen with a little extra pasta water.
8. Serve with extra Parmigiano Reggiano and a crack of black pepper.

NOTES

Fennel Seeds: Crushing them lightly helps release their aroma, but if you prefer a milder flavour, keep them whole.

Chicken Mince: Go for free-range or organic if possible for best quality and flavour. Thigh mince works beautifully here for added juiciness.

Pasta Shape: Mezze maniche (a short, wide pasta) works brilliantly, but rigatoni, penne lisce, calamaratta or orecchiette are all great alternatives.

Spinach Water: This acts as a flavour-packed liquid for blending the spinach and loosening the sauce—don't skip it!

Make Ahead: The spinach sauce can be blended a few hours in advance and stored in the fridge.

Leftovers: Will keep for up to 2 days in the fridge. Reheat gently with a splash of water in a hot pan.

Pasta Bake Option: This dish also makes a fantastic pasta bake. Simply transfer the hot pasta into an ovenproof baking dish, sprinkle generously with shredded mozzarella and Parmigiano Reggiano, and bake at 180°C/350°F for 20 minutes, or until bubbling and golden. If baking from cold, extend the baking time to 30 minutes.



Find the recipe and watch the video online:

<https://www.gatherandfeast.com/chicken-spinach-fennel-seed-mezze-maniche>

Let me know if you make the recipe! x @gatherandfeast