

The amount of supermarket shelf space devoted to pasta is a good indication of its popularity with consumers. There is of course a split between dried and 'fresh' pasta but what is not so well known is that serious compromises have been made along the way, to achieve the price point and shelf life that the supermarket supply chain requires. Dried pasta is now a low cost commodity available by the box or sachet in supermarkets. Almost all dried pasta is made using an industrial process that is far removed from the ancient artisan method. The huge extruding machines use plastic dies, which have a longer life and generate less heat, so the pasta can be produced faster and with greater control. The serious downside of this is that the pasta is very smooth and slippery when cooked. The rough texture that is typical of extruding through bronze has disappeared, and with it one of the most important attributes of good pasta. In addition, industrial-speed drying of pasta at high temperatures reduces the nutritional value and can compromise taste. It is all a very long way from pasta drying slowly in open-windowed barns, using just the hot, dry southern Italian breeze. What the supermarkets call fresh pasta is neither truly fresh nor of the quality that is available fresh in Italy every day in pasta shops and bakeries. The supermarkets are able to call their pasta 'fresh' because it has not been dried. It could not be called 'freshly made' because the pasta could actually be weeks old. The shelf life is extended by a combination of processes including heat-treatment and packing in a modified atmosphere. It is often made with a reduced egg content, can contain preservatives and the heat-treatment changes the texture and the taste, gelatinising the pasta.