

# Letitia Clark's simplest of pasta dishes

"I love butter. I come from a family of butter-fiends. My mother eats it in chunks from the pat, with a spoon, and my father spreads it as thick as cheese on his toast," explains food writer Letitia Clark, author of new cookbook *Bitter Honey*.

"Italian butter is very different to the kind readily available in England.

"Maybe (probably) I'm just getting old, but I'm sure lots of butter in England doesn't taste of anything anymore.

"In my last months before moving to Sardinia, I got into a habit of smelling the butter in shops. I would unfold some of the paper and have a good sniff of the pat inside.

"It drew some strange looks from other shoppers, but it's a sound method of judging the quality," she adds.

"A good butter has an unmistakable smell. It should smell of thick, cold, cream: ever-so-slightly cheesy, faintly sweet."

In Sardinia, where Letitia now lives, butter is "very rarely" used in cooking.

"When butter is used, it is as

## INGREDIENTS

(For two restrained diners, or one hungover/fragile one)  
220g dried pasta of your choice (I like risoni or any 'short' pasta best)  
120g butter  
8-10 small sage leaves  
70g parmesan, grated, plus extra to serve  
Sea salt

## METHOD

**1** Bring a large saucepan of well-salted water to the boil. Drop in the pasta.

**2** Place the butter in a wide, shallow pan and put on the



lowest heat. Add the sage and cook for a moment or so to gently to release the aromas. Drain the pasta when it is at your perfect al dente, reserving a cup of the cooking liquid.

**3** Add half the cooking water and the pasta to the pan with the butter and sage and turn up the heat. Stir and toss well for a minute or so, then add the cheese and toss again and again, until an emulsified and silky sauce forms. If it looks too dry, add more of the cooking water, too wet, carry on cooking. Serve with more cheese.

an essential flavour in the finished dish, rather than just a means of cooking," she explains - which this simple pasta dish demonstrates perfectly.

"Glamorous it may not be, but I could happily eat this dish every day for the rest of my life.

"It demonstrates perfectly the essential (and often overlooked) skill in making pasta sauces, and the first

thing everyone learns when they start cooking pasta in Italy; that the pasta cooking water must be added to the finished dish, to both emulsify the sauce and melt the grated cheese into a creamy consistency.

"Once you have learnt how to do this, you will never look back. The earthiness of the sage is what really grounds this recipe, so don't be tempted to leave it out."

