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Shareable Pasta Salad

The official start of summer was Saturday, but in the culinary world, it doesn't truly begin until the first, cool pasta salad is shared. That's exactly what you'll want to do with this pretty side dish. Whole-wheat pasta is rich in fiber and contains more nutrients than its refined counterpart. Plum tomatoes add color to the dish and contain lycopene, a potent cancer-protective phytochemical. Tart balsamic vinegar and fresh basil balance the dish with crisp, bright flavor.

Pasta Salad with Tomatoes

8 oz. whole-wheat fusilli, farfalle or other small pasta shape, cooked according to directions
1/4 cup balsamic vinegar (red or white)
4 Tbsp. finely chopped fresh basil, divided
1 tsp. turbinado sugar, optional
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1/8 tsp. crushed red pepper (or to taste)
3 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil, divided
4 cloves garlic, minced and divided
1 medium green bell pepper, finely chopped
4 plum or Roma tomatoes, coarsely chopped
1 slice whole-wheat bread (multigrain may be substituted)

In bowl, cover and chill pasta.

In large mixing bowl, combine vinegar, 2 tablespoons basil, sugar, salt, pepper, red pepper, 2 tablespoons oil and half of minced garlic. Whisk to combine well. Add pasta, bell pepper and tomatoes and toss gently until well coated.

In food processor or blender, place bread and pulse a few times to produce coarse crumbs. In a medium skillet, heat remaining oil over medium-high heat. Stir in breadcrumbs and garlic. Sauté about 1½ - 2 minutes until browned and crisp. Remove from heat and let cool.

Top pasta with garlic crumbs and remaining basil. Serve.

Makes 8 servings.

Per serving: 180 calories, 6 g total fat (1 g saturated fat), 27 g carbohydrate, 5 g protein, 4 g dietary fiber, 25 mg sodium.