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## Rapini, Sausage, and Orecchiette

*Rapini, also known as broccoli raab, is a delicious spring green that has yet to catch on in the American mainstream diet. Wildly popular in Italy, the slightly bitter green is related to the turnip and cabbage family, not broccoli as many believe. The tender stems and leaves can be braised, sautéed, steamed, and used in soups and salads. Pairing it with sausage and the cute little orecchiette pasta is a favorite Italian classic dish.*

One pound of orecchiette pasta (may substitute another small pasta such as ziti)  
Two large bunches of rapini, rinsed and cut into 2-3 inch strips  
One pound of crumbled sweet or hot Italian sausage  
Crushed red pepper flakes, to taste  
Freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Prepare the pasta according to package directions. While the pasta is cooking, prepare the rapini and sausage.

Heat a large skillet over medium high heat and when it's hot, add the crumbled sausage to the pan. Stir often to prevent sticking.

When the sausage is cooked through and no longer pink, add the greens and cook until the rapini is just wilted. If the rapini begins to stick a bit to the pan, just add a tablespoon or two of the pasta cooking water to moisten it.

Turn off the heat once the rapini is cooked and add the drained pasta to the pan. Toss, add red pepper flakes to taste, and serve immediately with the grated cheese.

**Make this a vegetarian dish:** To make this a vegetarian dish, just sauté the rapini in one tablespoon of olive oil until it's wilted, add the hot pasta, red pepper flakes and serve.

Serves 4-6.

*Victoria Wesseler*