

Tomato Sauce (#4) Mellowed by Simmering for Maccheroni

Source: The Splendid Table (www.splendidtable.org) - Adapted from *The Italian Country Table* by Lynne Rossetto Kasper.

This requires the least work of all cooked tomato sauces. With this technique, everything (tomatoes, olive oil & seasonings) goes into the pot more or less at once, usually with no presauté & simmers till thick. Instead of distinctively layered tastes of sauté-based sauces, simmering makes them softer, more tomatoey & mellow. A farmwoman at a weekly market in Umbria insisted that before adding the tomatoes all seasonings must be warmed in the oil for just 1 minute, never longer. Her version is so good, I haven't fiddled with it.

***Cook to Cook:** Italian cooks make this with unpeeled fresh or canned tomatoes, passing it through a food mill once cooked. I prefer a more rustic, juicy sauce with bits of tomato, so I roughly chop it in a blender or food processor. Only if fresh tomatoes' peels are tough or bitter do I peel them. This is a matter of personal choice.*

- * 5 large cloves garlic, coarsely chopped
- * 12 large fresh basil leaves, torn
- * 1/4 medium onion, coarsely chopped
- * 1/8 teaspoon each salt and freshly ground black pepper
- * 1/4 C fruity extra-virgin olive oil
- * 3 1/2 lbs mixed ripe delicious tomatoes, cored & possibly peeled (do not seed), or 2 28-oz cans whole tomatoes, drained
- * 1 lb modest-sized maccheroni, such as gemelli, strozzapretti, casareccia, zita, or penne, or substantial string pasta, such as perciatelli, spaghetti, linguine, or bucatini
- * 6 qts boiling salted water
- * 1 1/2 - 2 C (6 to 8 ounces) freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano (optional)

In 4-quart saucepan, combine garlic, basil, onion, salt & pepper + oil. Heat 1 minute over medium-high heat, no more. Add tomatoes, breaking them up with your hands as they go into the pan. Bring to lively bubble, uncovered - cook 30 minutes, or till sauce is thick & reduced by half. (Stir often, watching for sticking or scorching). Remove from heat, cover & let stand 15 minutes. Pass sauce through a food mill or chop in blender/food processor till in small pieces. (Sauce can be cooled/refrigerated up to 2 days, or frozen up to 3 months.) Cook pasta in fiercely boiling water, stirring often, till tender yet firm to the bite. Drain, toss with reheated sauce & serve immediately. (Grated cheese is an option.)

Wine Suggestion: A Sangiovese di Romagna or Chianti Classico (not Riserva)

Serves: 6-8 as a first course OR 4-6 as a main dish