

Pasta Bolognese

I don't want to boast, but I spent much time fine-tuning this sauce, and I must say; that it is one of the best pasta sauces I have ever tasted. It was so good I almost wanted to cry!

This sauce originates from the proud city of Bologna (thus the name), which lies in the heart of the fertile Po Valley in Emilia-Romagna, in north-central Italy. It is a very cultured city which many consider to be the culinary capitol of Italy. If this sauce is any indication, I would agree.

Bolognese is different from other meat sauces in that the meat is the star of the show, with the tomatoes in a supporting role. But there is one catch, you must start this sauce early in the afternoon, because it needs more than an hour to prepare and another three hours to simmer very slowly. This tenderizes the meat so it melts in your mouth, causing your taste buds to scream bravo, bravo!

5-6 servings

- 1/4 cup butter
- 3/4 cup onion—chopped fine
- 1/2 cup carrot—chopped fine
- 1/2 cup celery—chopped fine
- 6 ounces Pancetta—diced in small pieces (1/4" or smaller)
- 1 clove garlic—minced
- 3/4 pound ground beef*
- 3/4 pound ground veal*
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup whole milk
- 1/2 cup chicken stock
- 1-1/4 cup dry white wine (such as Pinot Grigio)
- 1—28 oz. can Whole Peeled Tomatoes—broken up with your hands
- 3/4 cup canned Tomato Sauce
- pinch crushed red peppers (optional)
- fresh ground black pepper
- 1 pound hearty pasta—such as rigatoni (my favorite), fettuccine or tagliatelle
- parmesan (preferably Parmigiano-Reggiano) - grated or curled
- 2 tablespoons Italian parsley—chopped

1. Heat the butter over medium heat in a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven or a large deep skillet. Sauté the onion, carrots and celery until softened, about 5 minutes.
2. Add Pancetta and sauté for 5 minutes. Add the garlic, and cook until onions begin to brown and garlic is softened and fragrant—2-3 minutes.
3. Add the ground meats and 1/2 teaspoon salt. As meat cooks, chop it relatively fine with the back of a wooden spoon, until it just loses its raw color, about 3 to 4 minutes.
4. Add the milk and simmer until it evaporates, about 10 to 12 minutes (there will still be some clear liquid visible from the fats).
5. Add the white wine and simmer until it evaporates, 12 to 15 minutes. Use your wooden spoon to scrape any browned-bits from the bottom of the pan (lot's of flavor!).
6. Add the Whole Peeled Tomatoes with their juices, the Tomato Sauce, the chicken stock, and a pinch of crushed red peppers if desired. Bring to a simmer. Then reduce heat as low as it will go and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 3 hours (see Frankie's Tip's).
7. Add several twists of fresh ground black pepper. Taste and adjust salt and pepper as needed.
8. When the sauce is almost done cooking, bring a large pot to a boil over high heat and add a tablespoon of salt. Cook your pasta until nearly al dente. Reserve about a 1/4 cup of pasta water before draining.
9. Drain pasta and return to the pasta pot. Stir the sauce into the pasta and pour in the reserved pasta water. Cook over medium heat for about 2 minutes, stirring constantly.
10. Serve up with parmesan and garnish with Italian parsley.



Suggested Wine: *Sangiovese*

You'd think after all the time making this sauce that it would call for a really exceptional wine, yet I found that an easy drinking Sangiovese worked best with it. Bigger wines competed with its subtle flavors. A Sangiovese from Emilia-Romagne would be wonderful but hard to find. This moderately-priced Tuscan version worked just right.

Frankie's recommendation: *Primavera Sangiovese*

Frankie's Tips:

- ◆ The primary reason for the three hour simmer is to properly tenderize the meat. Shorter times will not accomplish this well. The sauce will still have great flavor, but not the desired texture. Cooking hotter for a shorter time also does not work well. Only a long, and very slow simmer will get the job done right.
- ◆ When simmering properly, the sauce should just have a few bubbles coming up through it. Cooking at too brisk of a simmer will evaporate too much liquid. However, many ranges do not cook at a low enough temperature. There is a very simple solution though...
- ◆ Using tin foil, pull off two sheets about 14 to 16 inches long each. Lay them atop one another, and then starting with the long side, roll them up into a long snake. Bend it in to a circle, joining the two ends so you have a ring. Place that on top of your burner and place the pan on top of the ring. This lifts the pan and creates some insulation which will slow the simmer.
- ◆ I strongly suggest that you stick with the whole milk in this recipe for the richness it provides. If you don't have any whole milk but happen to have some cream or half & half around, add a little to your lower fat milk to balance it out.
- ◆ The pancetta in this recipe is best if it is cubed, as opposed to sliced thin like bacon.
- ◆ If you desire to double the recipe I strongly suggest you use two separate pans.