

Bolognese Meat Sauce

From Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking by Marcella Hazan

Ragù as the Bolognese call their celebrated meat sauce, is characterized by mellow, gentle, comfortable flavor that any cook can achieve by being careful about a few basic points:

- The meat should not be from too lean a cut; the more marbled it is, the sweeter the *ragù* will be. The most desirable cut of beef is the neck portion of the chuck.
- Add salt immediately when sautéing the meat to extract its juices for the subsequent benefit of the sauce.
- Cook the meat in milk before adding wine and tomatoes to protect it from the acidic bite of the latter.
- Do not use a *demi glace* or other concentrates that tip the balance of flavors toward harshness.
- Use a pot that retains heat. Earthenware is preferred in Bologna and by most cooks in Emilia-Romagna, but enameled cast-iron pans or a pot whose heavy bottom is composed of layers of steel alloys are fully satisfactory.
- Cook, uncovered, at the merest simmer for a long, long time; no less than 3 hours is necessary; more is better.

For 2 heaping cups, for about 6 servings and 1½ pounds pasta

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| 1 Tbsp. | Vegetable oil |
| 3 Tbsp. | Butter |
| 1 Tbsp. | Butter for tossing the pasta |
| ½ cup | Chopped onion |
| 2/3 cup | Chopped celery |
| 2/3 cup | Chopped carrot |
| ¾ lb. | Ground beef chuck (see prefatory note above) |
| 1 cup | Whole milk |
| 1 | Whole nutmeg |
| 1 cup | dry white wine |
| 1½ cups | Canned imported Italian plum tomatoes, cut up, with their juice |
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| 1¼ - 1½ lbs. | Pasta |
| | Freshly grated <i>Parmigiano-Reggiano</i> cheese at the table |
| | Salt and Black pepper, ground fresh from the mill |

Recommended pasta

There is no more perfect union in all gastronomy than the marriage of Bolognese *ragù* with homemade Bolognese *tagliatelle*. Equally classic is Baked Green Lasagne with Meat Sauce,

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Bolognese Style. *Ragù* is delicious with *tortellini* and ireproachable with such boxed, dry pasta as *rigatoni*, *conchiglie* or *fusilli*. Curiously, considering the popularity of the dish in the United Kingdom and countries of the Commonwealth, meat sauce in Bologna is never served over spaghetti.

1. Put the oil, butter, and chopped onion in the pot, and turn the heat on to medium. Cook and stir the onion until it has become translucent, then add the chopped celery and carrot. Cook for about 2 minutes, stirring the vegetables to coat them well.
2. Add the ground beef a large pinch of salt, and a few grindings of pepper. Crumble the meat with a fork, stir well, and cook until the beef has lost its raw, red color.
3. Add the milk and let it simmer gently, stirring frequently, until it has bubbled away completely. Add a tiny grating-about 1/8 teaspoon-of nutmeg, and stir.
4. Add the wine, let it simmer until it has evaporated, then add the tomatoes and stir thoroughly to coat all ingredients well. When the tomatoes begin to bubble, turn the heat down so that the sauce cooks at the laziest of simmers, with just an intermittent bubble breaking through to the surface. Cook uncovered, for 3 hours or more, stirring from time to time. While the sauce is cooking, you are likely to find that it begins to dry out and the fat separates from the meat. To keep it from sticking, continue the cooking, adding $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water whenever necessary. At the end, however, no water at all must be left and the fat must separate from the sauce. Taste and correct for salt.
5. Toss with cooked drained pasta, adding the tablespoon of butter, and serve with freshly grated Parmesan on the side.

Ahead-of-time note

If you cannot watch the sauce for a 3- to 4-hour stretch, you can turn off the heat whenever you need to leave, and resume cooking later on, as long as you complete the sauce within the same day. Once done, you can refrigerate the sauce in a tightly sealed container for 3 days, or you can freeze it. Before tossing with pasta, reheat it, letting it simmer for 15minutes and stirring it once or twice.

Variation of Ragù with Pork

Pork is an important part of Bologna's culture, its economy, and the cuisine, and many cooks add some pork to make their *ragù* tastier. Use 1 part ground pork, preferably from the neck or Boston butt, to 2 parts beef, and make the meat sauce exactly as described in the basic recipe above.