

Authentic Ragu Bolognese

2 tbsp. olive oil
1/4 cup butter
1 large yellow onion, finely and evenly diced
4 small (or 2 very large) carrots finely diced
4 stalks celery heart (leaves included) (or 2 large celery stalks) finely diced
4 garlic cloves (I like garlic so sometimes I add a bit more) finely diced
(I use my mini chopper, if I don't have that much time)
4.5 oz diced pancetta (I use imported Italian from Wegmans) 1/4 inch cubes

Sea Salt
Freshly Ground Black Pepper

2.2 lbs. lean ground meat (blend of veal, pork and beef - or just beef)
1 cup dry white wine, (Maggie's Chardonnay) but I have also used red sometimes (like Maggie's Cabernet or Melange Rouge)
2 cups whole milk
1 28 oz. can of whole San Marzano tomatoes diced (both the liquid and the tomatoes)
1 cup beef stock (or more to add as the sauce cooks down.)

2-3 Bay Leaves (some people don't use this but I like Bay leaves)

To Serve:

A few knobs of butter to toss with the pasta
Freshly grated parmigiano-reggiano

Fresh or dry tagliatelle, pappardelle, spaghetti, rigatoni, farfalle or gnocchi cooked in salted boiling water per instructions. I prefer a more substantial pasta than spaghetti.

Method:

Heat the butter and the oil together in a large and heavy Dutch oven or saucepan over medium heat (I use enameled Dutch oven). When the butter is melted and the saucepan is hot, add the onion, carrot, celery, garlic and a good pinch of salt and saute for 5 minutes, stirring often. Add the pancetta and cook for a further 10 minutes until vegetables are softened and pancetta is golden.

(Finely diced onion, carrot and celery help the sauce to have a better texture.)

Increase the heat to high and add the meat a third at a time, stirring and breaking the lumps with a spoon between each addition. Adding the meat gradually allows the liquid to evaporate which is key if you want to brown the meat instead of boiling it. After the last addition, when no pink can be seen in the meat and no lumps remain, set a timer to 15 minutes. You want the meat to caramelize and even become crispy in spots. More liquids will evaporate and flavors will concentrate. You want golden bits of meat to stick to the bottom of the pan which will be deglazed later. Watch over your pan as you don't want the meat to burn. When you see some serious caramelization happening, lower the heat to medium to reach the end of the 15 minute sautéing time.

Next, over medium heat, pour the wine into the pan. With a wooden spoon, scrape all the brown bits stuck to the bottom of the pan. Push the meat all around to make sure you scrape it all off. By the time you are finished, all the wine will be evaporated (2-3 minutes). Be careful that the meat doesn't stick again and lower the heat if necessary.

Now add the milk, diced tomatoes and their liquid and bay leaves and beef stock, a tsp of salt and a good grinding of black pepper. Bring to a boil and then lower the heat to low and let it simmer very slowly, half covered for 4

hours. Stir once and a while. If the sauce starts sticking before the end of the cooking time, lower the heat if possible and add more stock or water. In the end the sauce should be thick, more oil-than water-based and thick like oatmeal. Adjust the seasoning one last time and don't be afraid to add more salt (tasting each time you add some), it's this recipe's key seasoning.

To serve: Mix in a knob or two of butter and about two generous tablespoons of fresh grated parmigiano-reggiano per serving (these additions produce the creamy flavor).

Cook the pasta and drain it thoroughly and return to the pot spooning some sauce in to coat the pasta and the serve in bowls with fresh basil and a bit more sauce and some parmigiano grated on top.

Enjoy!