

RICH TOMATO SAUCE

4 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium sized onion finely chopped
2 or 3 cloves of garlic chopped
450g/1lb tinned tomatoes or tomato passata
3 tablespoons sun dried tomato paste

½ cup parsley chopped (optional)
pinch of dried oregano
salt and pepper
small bunch basil (optional)

METHOD

1. Fry the onions in the olive oil until golden brown. Add the chopped garlic and fry for a minute or so more.
2. Add the passata and the sun dried tomato paste which gives a lovely rich flavour.
3. Add the parsley and dried oregano to the mixture and simmer for about twenty minutes. If tomatoes do not have much juice with them, add a can or two of water to the mixture. This will allow the sauce to cook without becoming dry and develop flavour. A sauce must be 'saucy' and not dry.
4. Season to taste with salt and freshly ground pepper.
5. Fresh chopped basil added towards the end of the cooking also enhances the flavour of the sauce.

PTO for other dishes that can be made using the rich tomato sauce base

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ARRABIATA SAUCE

Simply add a good pinch of chilli flakes, a good dash of Tabasco sauce or any other chilli powder to the sauce according to how hot you like your food. Add a little of the chillis at a time as you can always add more but you cannot remove it if you have added too much. Heat the sauce and serve on penne (quill shaped pasta) or if not available any cooked pasta of choice.

BEAN OR CHICKPEA STEW

Drain a 450g tin of beans of choice or chickpeas and add the content of the tin to 1 recipe of rich tomato sauce. All to simmer together until well reduced. You can add a little more herb of choice if you like. Serve with polenta or rice as a delicious and easy meal.

PASTA WITH TOMATOES AND MASCARPONE

Add a few tablespoons of mascarpone cheese to the tomato sauce just before serving. It seems to make the sauce less acidic. Adjust the seasoning and mix in well with pasta of choice. If you want to make this in advance, pour into a baking dish and sprinkle over mozzarella or parmesan cheese and bake until golden. You may want to sprinkle torn basil leaves over the dish before serving.

SEAFOOD PASTA OR SEAFOOD STEW

Using the tomato sauce recipe, add cleaned uncooked prawns, cubed white fish and shelled mussels or any cooked seafood of choice to the sauce. Bring up to the boil and immediately turn down the heat and allow the stew to simmer until all ingredients are well heated and amalgamated. Serve on its own as a stew with crusty bread or over spaghetti as a pasta.

PTO for more ideas for using a basic tomato sauce base

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SHAKSHOUKA

Cut into strips and gently saute 2 large peppers of any colour in a little olive oil until golden and soft. Add these to the basic tomato sauce along with a dash of chilli powder or oil and a teaspoon of cumin seed. Cook until well amalgamated. Place the mixture in a frying pan or in an oven proof dish. Make four indentations in the sauce and into each one drop a whole egg. If in a frying pan, cover with a lid and cook until the eggs are soft but done then serve. If in an oven proof dish, cover and allow the entire dish to bake until the eggs are correctly cooked.

BARBECUE SAUCE

For a super piquant barbecue sauce, add a few tablespoons each of Worcestershire sauce, soya sauce, concentrated apple juice and cider vinegar to the tomato sauce. If you want a little more heat, add a dash of chilli oil or chill powder to the sauce too. Taste for seasoning and add more vinegar if acidity required and apple juice if sweetness needed. Check for salt too as this makes all the difference to anything.

If you would like to make your own baked beans, simply add a tine of precooked beans of choice to the barbecue sauce and allow to simmer and flavours to amalgamate. This dish is even better the following day when all the flavours have mingled together.

PARMIGIANO

Fry slices of aubergine in olive oil until golden brown and then layer with tomato sauce and Parmesan cheese ending with Parmesan cheese on the top. Bake in oven 200°C until golden brown.

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PUTTANESCA

Add piquant ingredients to the basic tomato sauce for another wondrous sauce. Separate recipe supplied.

POLPETTE

Make small well seasoned balls of minced beef and cook in the sauce. Separate recipe supplied.