



Making tortelloni all'ortica with a spinach pasta at the Antica Trattoria del Cacciatore in Bologna (similar recipe made with regular egg pasta, page 123).

Ragù sauce in one form or another has traveled the world. Nearly all the regions of Italy have their own variations, using chicken livers, or beef, or pork and veal, or dry white wine instead of red. The amount of tomato used can be adjusted according to personal taste, but it must not be overpowering.

Ragù is usually made ahead of time, and stored in the refrigerator for a few days, where it improves as the flavors meld. Italians have taken to freezing it in well-sealed containers, since it takes some time to cook, and is very handy to have ready for unexpected guests. Serve ragù bolognese with tagliatelle or another type of pasta, making sure to mix the ragù well with the hot pasta in a heated dish so that the pasta is thoroughly impregnated with the sauce. The dish can then be topped with a little butter, and it should be served with plenty of grated Parmigiano cheese to pass at the table.

Ragù Bolognese Bolognese Meat Sauce

From Stefano Ferrari of the Antica Trattoria del Cacciatore, Bologna

Serves 6

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| 2 ounces pancetta, finely chopped to yield ½ cup | 3 ounces chicken livers, chopped to yield ½ cup |
| 1 tablespoon butter | 1 cup white wine |
| 1 tablespoon olive or vegetable oil | 3 tablespoons tomato paste |
| 1 cup peeled and finely chopped onion | 1 teaspoon salt |
| ½ cup peeled and finely chopped carrot | 1 teaspoon pepper |
| ½ cup trimmed and finely chopped celery | ½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg (optional) |
| 1 pound ground pork, veal, or beef, or a mixture of these | 2 cups meat stock, heated |
| | 1 cup cream or milk (optional) |

Brown the *pancetta* gently in a large pot with the butter and oil. (Some cooks swear that the *ragù* must be made in an earthenware pot or the flavor is changed dramatically.) Add the chopped onion, carrot, and celery and sauté over medium heat.

When the vegetables have browned, add the ground meat and brown evenly. Add the chopped livers; then in 3 minutes, add the wine and cook until it evaporates. Finally, add the tomato paste and stir. Season with the salt, pepper, and nutmeg if desired, and add the stock. Bring to a boil, cover, lower the heat, and simmer for 2 hours.

Stir the *ragù* occasionally while it is cooking and taste for seasoning, adding salt if necessary. After 2 hours, remove the cover and simmer a while longer to reduce the liquid if the sauce is too runny. Some Bolognese add 1 cup of cream or milk to the sauce at the very end, to make it smoother.

(Photograph opposite page)

OPPOSITE ►

Traditional pasta served at the Antica Trattoria del Cacciatore: on top, tortelloni all'ortica in a butter and sage sauce (similar recipe page 123); on the bottom, a serving of tagliatelle topped with ragù bolognese (recipe above).