

Special to the St. Helena Farmers' Market
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Seven Days, Seven Dishes, One Cherry Tomato Sauce

By Suzanne Carreiro

Farmers' Market Weekly Shopping List: 5-1/2 pounds of cherry tomatoes—red, orange, yellow—Italian parsley, basil, red, orange or yellow bell pepper, eggplant, mushrooms, zucchini, garlic, celery, onions, extra virgin olive oil, Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, and aged Tuscan or Umbrian Pecorino. At the grocery store buy heavy cream, canned tuna, anchovy fillets, pancetta, and seven pounds of dry pasta—spaghettini, spaghetti, penne.

Cherry Tomato Sauce

This richly flavored tomato sauce lightly coats the pasta, clinging to each strand—this is how pasta is served in Italy. Pasta is always tossed or cooked briefly in sauce so that the pasta absorbs its flavor. Pasta is never smothered in sauce. Here's the recipe for the basic sauce, plus six variations—one sauce for every day of the week. For four servings/1 pound of dry spaghettini, spaghetti, or penne pasta: In a large pot, boil enough water to cook 1 pound of the pasta (follow the package cooking instructions). While the water comes to a boil and the pasta is cooking, sauté 2 or 3 sliced large garlic cloves in about 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil about 1 minute. Stir in about 12 ounces of quartered cherry tomatoes; add kosher salt and red pepper flakes to taste, but don't skimp on the salt. Cook and stir until saucy, about 4 minutes—and it's done! Stir in a couple of tablespoons of chopped basil or parsley, if desired. When the pasta is al dente, save about 1/2 cup of the pasta cooking liquid; drain the pasta and return it to the pot. Add the sauce; toss. Stir in enough of the pasta cooking liquid to moisten the pasta; cook and stir about 1 minute. Adjust the salt and season with freshly ground black pepper to taste. Serve with grated cheese, if desired.

6 Cherry Tomato Sauce Variations

Make the basic cherry tomato sauce, but add the suggested ingredients following these instructions:

- Eggplant or Zucchini: Sauté a small, diced eggplant or zucchini with the garlic until it is limp. Add a chiffonade of basil at the end.
- Tomato-Cream: Increase the red pepper flakes to make a spicy sauce. At the end, add a generous splash of cream and minced basil.
- Pancetta: Sauté diced pancetta or bacon and chopped onion with the garlic until the pancetta is cooked but not crispy. Serve with grated pecorino cheese.
- Tuna: Sauté 1 diced stalk of celery with the garlic. Near the end, stir in a small can of drained tuna and a bit of chopped Italian parsley.
- Roasted Pepper: Sauté a bit of diced onion with the garlic. Near the end, stir in a diced roasted red, orange, or yellow bell pepper.
- Mushroom: Brown diced mushrooms with the garlic; stir in minced Italian parsley or basil near the end. Serve with Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese.
- Anchovy: Mash an anchovy fillet and stir it in with the tomatoes.

Suzanne Carreiro is a food and wine consultant and cooking teacher in St. Helena. She is finishing a travel memoir/cookbook after living in Italy's Umbria region for a year. The book will be available in 2009. She can be contacted at suzanne@cookwithclass.com.