

Mountain Beef Rágu Bolognese

By Greg Atkinson, www.westcoastcooking.com

Strict rules govern the exact proportions and procedures for making the authentic meat sauce of Bologna. (It is important to remember that this sauce is a meat sauce with tomato, not a tomato sauce with meat.) But the West Coast version is less rigid, more forgiving, and slightly lighter in nature. In its home territory, the dairy-rich Emilia-Romagna region of Northern Italy, Rágu Bolognese is always finished with a generous splash of heavy cream. Here, olive oil is the primary enrichment. If you can afford it, use extra virgin California olive oil such as "Pasolivo" from the Willow Creek Olive Ranch in Paso Robles. There is no real substitute for real "Parmigiano Reggiano." Serve the Ragú in small amounts with plenty of hot hand made noodles or spaghetti. Pass the grated cheese separately.

(Serves 6)

8 ounces pancetta or salt pork, cut into 1/4-inch dice

1/3 cup olive oil

1 large carrot, cut into 1/4-inch dice

2 stalks celery, cut into 1/4-inch dice

1 medium-sized onion, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch dice

1/2 cup off-dry red wine such as Lambrusco

1 tablespoon chopped fresh garlic

1 pound chopped stew meat or ground beef

1 tablespoon fresh oregano, chopped, or 1 teaspoon dried

1 tablespoon fresh thyme, chopped, or 1 teaspoon dried

2 cups chopped tomatoes in their juice

salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Fresh tagliatelli or fettuccini, cooked "al dente," (see p. x.)

"Parmigiano Reggiano" cheese, grated, to taste

- 1.) In a large saucepan over medium-high heat, cook diced pancetta or salt pork until most of the fat is rendered. Pour off most of the pork fat and replace it with olive oil.
- 2.) Add carrot, celery and onion, and sauté 5 minutes or until onion is translucent and just beginning to brown. Add wine and garlic and cook another five minutes or until wine has boiled away and vegetables are beginning to fry again. You will hear them sizzle when the liquid is gone.
- 3.) Add beef and chopped herbs; then cook another five minutes, or until beef is browned. Add tomatoes and reduce heat to low.
- 4.) Simmer the sauce, stirring occasionally for at least two hours, or until the liquid has almost completely evaporated. Do not allow the sauce to dry out or stick; stir it regularly.

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