

# Alison's Bolognese

Serves about 8-10, more or less depending on the crowd and what else is being served

This is my bolognese, emphasis on the "my." Will it be for the purists? Not likely, but at its core, I still play by the rules: Fatty meat, tomato, wine, milk and a long, slow, gentle simmer. There are no carrots or celery here, but there is a fennel bulb (sweet like carrots, vegetal like celery), and to double down on the blasphemy, a bit of fennel seed. This version might be a touch more tomato-y than a classic bolognese, but that's how I prefer it, almost splitting the difference between ragù and bolognese. I'm not wedded to the classic mythology of chopping the meat by hand, so feel free to mix your own blend of pork, beef, veal, and because someone is going to ask: sure, turkey-- but don't go too lean, or you'll never earn that rich, creamy emulsification, no matter how long you simmer.

## Ingredients

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2 tablespoons olive oil

1 pound ground beef

1 pound ground pork

Kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper

6 cloves garlic, thinly sliced

2 medium yellow onions, finely chopped

1 fennel bulb, finely chopped

2 tablespoons fennel seed

Pinch crushed red pepper flakes

1 cup dry white wine\* (nothing sweet, should be acidic, nothing too fancy but still something you'd love to drink)

1 28-oz can crushed tomatoes (or whole peeled tomatoes, crushed by hand)

3 cups chicken, vegetable or beef broth or water, plus Better Than Bouillon (using just water will also work), plus more if needed

2 cups whole milk

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, optional

Pasta (long, flat noodles or short, fat tubes), cooked al dente

Cheese (hard and salty, such as such as parmesan, pecorino, or grana padano), for serving

\*If not using or cooking with alcohol, use water and a good splash of white wine vinegar.

\*\*The pasta should arrive to the table already dressed, mixed and seasoned. More cheese and chili flake (if you're a freak like me) are also welcomed (those can be presented on the side). Sadly, and you'll almost never hear me say this, this isn't the time nor place for parsley.

## Instructions

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- 1 Heat olive oil in a large, heavy bottomed dutch oven or pot over medium-high heat. Add the beef and pork and season with salt and pepper. Using your wooden spoon or spatula, break up the meat as it browns (the ultimate end goal is for the meat to effectively melt into the sauce, so you do want it in smaller pieces from the get go).
- 2 Continue cooking the meat until it's about 80% browned to your liking (this should take 10-15 minutes at least), then add the garlic, onion and fennel. Season again with salt and pepper and continue cooking until the meat is browned 100% to your liking and the onion and fennel are softened nicely, but without much color themselves (another 10-15 minutes).
- 3 Add the fennel seed and crushed red pepper flakes, if using (if not-- are you some sort of purist? Honestly, respect).
- 4 Add the white wine and let it cook down until it's barely there, 2-4 minutes, followed by the tomatoes, broth and milk (the milk may separate a bit or look grainy at this point—don't worry, it will meld together as the sauce simmers). Bring to a strong simmer and then reduce the heat to medium-low (or, if you have an especially powerful range, low). Let this sauce gently simmer and lightly bubble for at least two (2) hours, uncovered, stirring occasionally, tasting as you go because it already smells so good, you can't believe you have to wait that long, so may as well taste as you go. NOTE: You do NOT want this sauce to boil or you risk messing up the eventual emulsification of the sauce (read: it'll always feel soupy/grainy rather than silky/creamy). If it seems very thick after one hour, add additional broth. Alternatively, you can pop your oven safe dutch oven into a 300° oven for the same amount of time, but then it becomes more difficult to taste as you go, my favorite part.
- 5 Around the two hour mark, the sauce should be thickened considerably, the meat melting into the tomatoes, everything tasting slightly sweet a little tangy, deeply meaty. If it still looks soupy or like the meat is not fully melted/incorporated into the sauce, it needs more time. And if it needs more time, it needs more time! Keep simmering.
- 6 Once the sauce is to your liking, add the butter, let it melt. Prepare your pasta as you would, get out the cheese and your cheese grater or microplane. Make a little salad if you want. Get ready for the whole experience.
- 7 When it's time to mix the pasta with the sauce, I know you're going to do what you want, but let me say this: Pasta should be lightly dressed with bolognese, not doused. This sauce is rich and fatty and needs to be treated almost like a condiment. Remember: you can always add more but you can't take away.

**DO AHEAD:** If you find yourself with more sauce than you can eat tonight, well, don't worry, this sauce freezes beautifully. Reheat in a pot over low heat, adding water or broth as needed to thin. Future self thanks you!

**ALISON ROMAN**