

Spaghetti Bolognese

For 4 people – takes 40 minutes from start to serving

Ingredients:

500 g. spaghetti
400 g. minced meat
1 chopped onion
1 chopped carrot
1 chopped clove of garlic
750 g. chopped plum tomatoes
Salt and pepper
Oil (preferably olive oil)

Optional:

basil
oregano
either Worcester sauce or beef stock (like an Oxo cube) but not both
Grated cheese (preferably Parmesan)

Perhaps the most important thing to remember about this meal is that it takes 11 minutes to cook spaghetti until it is just right - "al dente". The longer that you cook the sauce, the better it will get - you can even cook the sauce for an hour or more.

Pasta:

First, put 1.5 litres of water into a saucepan. Add 1 level soup spoon of salt to the water. Then add 1 soup spoon of oil. Turn on the heat and start to bring the water to a boil. The water will need to be boiling by the time that you have 11 minutes left before serving up the meal. Alternatively, boil the water in an electric kettle so that it's ready when you need it and pour it into the saucepan at the right time, adding first the salt and then the oil.

Sauce:

Chop the onion and carrot into small bits. Put 2 tablespoons of oil in a saucepan and turn the heat up medium-high. Add the chopped onion and chopped carrot - they should sizzle if the oil is hot enough. Fry them until the onion starts to brown. Add the minced meat and brown it and then add the chopped plum tomatoes, a large pinch of salt and a large pinch of pepper.

Optional: add a teaspoon of basil. If you want a deeper taste, add a large pinch of oregano. If you want a more savoury or meaty taste, add either two squirts of Worcester sauce or some beef stock (half an Oxo cube) - but don't add both! - the taste would overpower the rest of the sauce.

Bring the sauce to a boil and then turn down the heat so that the sauce simmers gently, stirring from time to time. This should make a sauce that is not runny. Add a small amount of water during cooking if the sauce becomes too thick. The longer that you cook the sauce, the better it will get - you can even cook the sauce for an hour if you need to - just make sure that you simmer it gently and stir it from time to time so that it doesn't stick to the pan, and add a little bit of water as necessary to stop it going too solid.

Pasta:

It takes 11 minutes to cook spaghetti until it is just right - "al dente".

So, 11 minutes before you want to serve the meal, add the spaghetti to the saucepan of boiling water. Leave it to stand on end in the pan, and after about 30 seconds use a large spoon gradually to push the upper ends of the spaghetti downwards. As the spaghetti softens it will bend - keep pushing gently until all of the spaghetti is covered by the water.

Wait a minute, and then use a spoon to turn over and stir the spaghetti. This will help to make sure that the spaghetti doesn't stick together in lumps (the oil that you added to the water will help the spaghetti to keep separate).

Wait a couple of minutes and stir the spaghetti again.

After the spaghetti has been cooking for 10 minutes altogether, use a fork to lift one strand of spaghetti out of the pan and - careful, it's hot! - put it in your mouth and chew it. If you think that it's not salty enough, add a teaspoonful of salt to the boiling water.

Serving:

Use a soup spoon to taste the sauce - careful, it's hot too! Is it salty enough? Only add a pinch of salt at a time if you need to. Does it need another pinch of pepper? After the spaghetti has been cooking for 11 minutes, use a fork to lift another strand of spaghetti out of the pan and - careful, it's hot! - put it in your mouth and chew it. Is it "al dente"? Does it feel like it's cooked, or is it still a bit too hard? If it's still too hard, wait 30 seconds and then try another strand of spaghetti, but if it feels like it's cooked enough, drain the water quickly from the spaghetti (spaghetti continues to "cook" while it's hot).

Take two forks, one in each hand, and use them to serve the spaghetti onto plates.

Use a large spoon to serve the sauce on top of the spaghetti.

If you have some grated cheese available, let each person can sprinkle some on their meal as they wish.

Buon appetito!