



Linguine with Tomato Sauce

This is one of my all-time-favorite pasta dishes and it's shockingly simple to make. You can use spaghetti or any ribbon pasta, but for some reason, I'm partial to linguine. Of course, the tastier and riper the tomatoes, the better the sauce. In winter, I often buy Roma tomatoes when they look good and let them ripen for a few days. Then I make this dish and dream about summer and my vegetable garden.

I usually serve this with a large platter of seasonal vegetables, depending on what looks best in the market. Boiled green beans, boiled asparagus, roasted beets, sautéed kale or chard are all good side dishes. In winter, I sometimes accompany with roasted acorn squash grazed with butter and sprinkled with a little brown sugar. For nights when I want to keep things especially simple, I accompany with crusty bread and follow with a salad of mixed greens.

About 2-1/2 to 3 lb	Roma tomatoes (13 to 15 tomatoes)
3 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
4 or 5	cloves garlic, finely chopped
	Salt and freshly ground pepper
Handful	fresh basil leaves, torn or chopped into small pieces
1 lb	linguine or spaghetti pasta (use a good, imported brand such as DeCecco)
About 1/4 lb	Parmigiano Reggiano, freshly grated before serving

Peel tomatoes: With a sharp paring knife, cut out the core of each tomato and cut a small "x" in the bottom end. Then immerse tomatoes in boiling water for about 30 to 60 seconds. Drain water and let tomatoes cool for a minute or so. Skin will peel off easily.

Cut tomatoes in half horizontally and using your fingers, remove seeds. (I usually do this over the sink.) If some remain, that's fine. Then chop tomatoes finely with a knife and place in a strainer over a bowl to drain excess juices.

In a medium-size sauté pan, heat olive oil. Add garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant; do not brown. Then add and cook over high heat for a few minutes; tomatoes should be bubbling. Then reduce heat, season with salt and pepper to taste and continue to cook for about 20 minutes or so, stirring from time to time. Stir in basil, cook for another minute, then cover and turn off heat. Taste and adjust seasoning, if necessary.

Meanwhile, bring large pot of water to boil. Add salt (about 1 to 2 tbsp for a large pot) and then add pasta. Cook pasta until tender but firm, stirring periodically and checking along the way to make sure you don't overcook it.

Drain pasta well (if there's too much water on the pasta, it will dilute the tomato sauce, which you don't want). Place in large pasta bowl. Add tomato sauce and toss to coat well. Then add a handful of grated Parmigiano cheese and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately and pass around remaining cheese and a pepper grinder.

Makes about 4 servings.