



# SPAGHETTI SAUCES

Authentic Italian Recipes from  
*Biba Caggiano*



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**Biba Caggiano**

**Photographs by Jessica Nicosia-Nadler**



**GIBBS SMITH**

TO ENRICH AND INSPIRE HUMANKIND

Authentic Italian Recipes from

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~~To my six grandchildren: Andrew, Alex, Aidan, William, Lucy, and Jack. To my two daughters: Carla and Paola, and their husbands, Tim and Brian. And to my husband Vincent, who is at his happiest when we are all at the dinner table together enjoying the food and the wine.~~

# Spaghetti Sauces

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# Introduction

There is an old Italian saying, *A tavola non s'invecchia*—"at the table one never grows old." That is possibly why Italians used to spend a great deal of time around the table—savoring good food, sipping good wine, and enjoying their company.

Today, most women work outside of the home and the food they prepare daily is simpler than what the generation before them served. A plate of pasta might be followed only by a salad and cheese. The three-to-four-course dinner seems to be a thing of the past, or it is prepared only for special occasions.

This is a cookbook about spaghetti—a string pasta that most people in the world, young and old, love. Many of the sauces in this book are quick, inspired, and uncomplicated, with perhaps the exception of the ragu chapter, and are absolutely delicious. Just think that while the water comes to a boil and cooks the pasta, you can make a tasty sauce. How great would it be to come home from work and know that in 15 to 20 minutes you can have a wonderful pasta dish on the table?

## Spaghetti, the Italian Gold

I was born and raised in Bologna, a city well known for its amazing homemade pasta, and fed a daily diet of tagliatelle, tortellini, ravioli, and lasagna. Yet today, when I crave pasta, I often reach for a box of factory made spaghetti. Perhaps it is the immediacy of the product that is so appealing. No hassle, no fuss. Just reach for the box and drop the pasta into boiling water. Nothing can be quicker and appease hunger like a plate of perfectly cooked spaghetti.

For many people who have traveled to Italy, "spaghetti" conjures up images of a sunny land. A land of white beaches, tranquil seas, high mountains, magnificent cities, quaint towns, and gregarious people who are at their happiest when they gather around the table with a steaming bowl of wholesome, mouthwatering pasta.

Of the many types of regional Italian pasta, spaghetti is perhaps the most familiar, the least threatening, and the most immediate. Boisterous and colorful in the South, it is more restrained and luscious in the North. Throughout the centuries, people all over the world learned how to preserve grain against the vagaries of weather, molds, and insect infestation. They learned how to turn grain into flour and eventually into pasta with its innumerable shapes. Spaghetti, with its rich golden color is Naples' contribution to the regional Italian table and, without any doubt, is the most popular pasta in the world and a symbol of all things Italian.

Spaghetti is also the perfect dish to prepare for an impromptu get together. *Ci facciamo una spagheettata?* —"How about a nice plate of spaghetti?" The *spagheettata* is an Italian ritual. It takes place in someone's home or in a homey trattoria. The only rule is that the spaghetti be tossed with

quick, appetizing sauces and that it gets to the table while hot—and, of course, that it is enjoyed in a spirit of conviviality.

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When I have family or friends over for a spaghettiata, I use seasonal ingredients as well as ingredients I have in my well-stocked pantry. Canned Italian tomatoes, white tuna packed in oil, anchovies, olives, garlic, capers, sun-dried tomatoes, dried porcini mushrooms, roasted bell peppers, marinated artichoke hearts, and so on, can be used all year around. In spring and summer, I take advantage of what the season has to offer; ripe tomatoes, spring onions, fresh basil, peas, asparagus, and zucchini. I often enhance the flavor of the sauces with some diced prosciutto, smoked pancetta, or a really great olive oil. And the nice thing is all of these sauces can be made in the time the water comes to the boil and cooks the pasta.

Because I work at my restaurant six days a week, on Sunday, when my grandchildren come over for dinner, this is the type of food I like to cook. Quick, stress free, flavorful sauces tossed with spaghetti. I look at my grandchildren's faces as they try to twirl the spaghetti around their forks and some strands fall back onto the plate in spite of their efforts . . . it is pure magic! Then a small voice says, "Nonna, more spaghetti please!"

## **Spaghetti and Other Pasta Shapes**

Spaghetti and other dry pastas are made with durum wheat flour and water. This dry pasta, which has the golden color of wheat, is made in factories all over Italy using a large mixer and extruded by putting the dough through different sizes of metal dies to form the various shapes. These shapes are then dried in temperature-controlled chambers.

In choosing factory made pasta, look for an imported Italian brand. Some of my favorites are: Rustichella d'Abruzzo, Del Verde, Martelli, Barilla, La Molisana, De Cecco, and Fini. Factory made Italian pasta, when properly cooked, swells considerably in size while maintaining its toothsome texture and immediacy. Just reach for a box of imported pasta and in no time at all you will have a mouthwatering pasta dish on your table. Spaghettini, linguine, vermicelli, rigatoni, and penne may be used instead of spaghetti to be served with your favorite sauces.

## **How to Cook Perfect Spaghetti**

- Always use a large pot with plenty of water, about 6 quarts.
- When the water boils, add a few pinches of salt and the spaghetti.
- Cook, uncovered, stirring a few times. If there is plenty of water in the pot, the spaghetti will not stick together.

- The cooking time of spaghetti depends on its thickness and brand. Read the cooking instructions on the package, but taste the spaghetti for doneness a few times during cooking. Perfectly cooked spaghetti should be tender but still firm to the bite.
- Once the spaghetti is cooked, drain and toss it immediately with the sauce in a large warm bowl or in the skillet where the sauce is simmering.
- Never rinse the spaghetti, it will wash off the layers of starch that helps bind the sauce with the pasta.
- And finally, remember that pasta waits for no one—my mother’s favorite motto. If pasta is made to wait, in the skillet with the sauce or in the dish, it will become overcooked and limp.

## The Dry Pantry

The following are basic staples that should always be available in an Italian pantry. These ingredients can be kept for months and they are the key to the success of your dishes. Basic non-perishable items such as dried pasta, rice, canned tomatoes, dried mushrooms, olive oil, capers, and anchovies are some of my favorites, and they can be quickly transformed into a tasty sauce.

- Anchovies - packed in oil, are chopped and used for pasta sauces.
- Canned Plum Tomatoes - San Marzano peeled tomatoes are perhaps the best canned variety. They can easily be transformed into a quick delicious tomato sauce.
- Capers – another useful ingredient to keep in your pantry. They go very well with olive oil, olives, sun-dried tomatoes, and many other ingredients to make a caper sauce.
- Dried Herbs - when fresh herbs are not available, keep dried oregano, rosemary, sage, thyme and marjoram at hand. Use them as soon as you can and in moderation. The older they are, the stronger their flavor is.
- Extra Virgin Olive Oil - an amazing ingredient to be added to most Italian dishes.
- Garlic - fresh only, to be minced and added to pasta sauces in moderation.
- Olives - green and black, great to chop and add to a pesto or pasta sauce.

- Other Dried Spices - such as cinnamon and nutmeg; use them as soon as you can.
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- Pasta – spaghetti or linguine, ziti, bucatini, penne, rigatoni, and shells imported from Italy, just to mention a few.
  - Pine Nuts - often added to pesto sauces.
  - Porcini - wild Italian mushrooms that grow under chestnut trees. Dried porcini lasts several months and enriches a pasta sauce instantly.
  - Sun-Dried Tomatoes - keep in your pantry to use when fresh tomatoes are out of season.
  - Wine – (besides for drinking) is often used to give body and taste to a sauce. The better the wine, the better your sauce tastes.

## **The Refrigerated Pantry**

Fresh ingredients look better and taste better when used within a few days. While the dry pantry ingredients can be kept for months, the ingredients in the refrigerator should be purchased and used while they are fresh. Just keep in mind that the secret of Italian cooking lies in its freshness and the fidelity to its ingredients.

- Butter – unsalted, is mild and delicious. A pat of sweet, unsalted butter added to a hot tomato sauce will tame the strong taste of the tomato.

## **Cheeses**

- Gorgonzola - a typical cheese of Lombardy with a strong, yet creamy texture. It is great for sauces or served with wine-roasted pears.
- Mascarpone - is a soft, buttery, mild cow's milk cheese. It is used as a table cheese or as an ingredient for desserts.
- Mozzarella - a southern Italian cheese that is light and delicate. It is a perfect ingredient for pizza or served with fresh ripe tomatoes and basil.
- Parmigiano-Reggiano - is one of the best cheeses of Italy and is made in the flat land of Emilia-Romagna. Buy a nice chunk and use it grated over pasta, soup, risotto, or gnocchi.

Parmigiano is not used over seafood because its fragrant aroma can overwhelm the delicate taste of fish.

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- Pecorino Romano - one of the oldest Roman cheeses. It has a peppery taste that coats and lingers after it is grated over the pasta.
- Ricotta - is a soft, fresh cheese that can be used in myriad ways. It is great for the filling of homemade pasta and pastries.
- Taleggio - is a whole cow's milk cheese typical of the region of Lombardy in Northern Italy. It has a creamy, mild, and sweet flavor and can be used in cooking or served at the end of a meal with a crisp white wine.



## Meats

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- Pancetta - this unsmoked Italian bacon is cured in salt and spices and aged for a few months. Pancetta is rolled up like a salami and its unique savory taste is essential to many Italian dishes.
- Prosciutto di Parma - is unsmoked, salted, and air-cured ham made from the hog's hind thigh. This magnificent ham can be eaten sliced as an appetizer or a snack, or diced as a component of many pasta sauces and pasta fillings.
- Speck - is smoked Italian ham from the Alpine mountains of Northern Italy. It can be eaten as an appetizer or diced as a component of many pasta sauces.



# Cheese

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# Butter, Cream, Parmigiano, and Nutmeg

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Con Burro, Panna, Parmigiano e Noce Moscata

This preparation is typical of many Italian regions. When I was a child, my mother prepared it for me, my sister, and my brother, but instead of spaghetti, she made these amazing tagliatelle (homemade noodles) that were simply wonderful topped with this easy sauce.

1 pound spaghetti

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

1-1/2 cups heavy cream

1/3 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

Salt, to taste

1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, divided

1. Cook spaghetti in boiling salted water according to the package directions. When pasta is almost done, scoop up and reserve about 1/2 cup of the cooking water.
2. Meanwhile, heat the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. As soon as the butter begins to foam, add the cream and nutmeg and season with salt. Simmer until the cream just begins to thicken, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn off the heat under the skillet.
3. Drain pasta, leaving just a little water attached to its strands, and place in the skillet. Season pasta lightly with salt. Add 1/3 cup of the Parmigiano and quickly toss over low heat until the sauce coats the pasta. Add some of the reserved cooking water if pasta seems a bit dry. Taste, adjust the seasoning, and serve with additional Parmigiano.

Serves 4 to 6



# Butter, Sage, Ricotta, and Parmigiano

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**Burro, Salvia, Ricotta e Parmigiano**

This dish reflects the simplicity of old peasant-style Italian cooking when dishes were prepared with whatever ingredients one had at hand. When I tested this dish, I used a superlative ricotta from San Francisco and a Parmigiano-Reggiano from my home region of Emilia-Romagna. Check your local Italian market for the best cheeses you can get.

1 pound spaghetti  
6 tablespoons unsalted butter  
6 to 8 fresh sage leaves, shredded  
1/2 pound ricotta cheese or goat cheese  
1-1/2 cups whole milk  
1/3 to 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese  
Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

1. Cook spaghetti in boiling salted water according to package directions. When pasta is almost done, scoop up and reserve 1/2 cup of the cooking water.
2. Meanwhile, heat the butter in a small skillet, add the sage, and stir for a minute or two. Place butter and sage in a large warm bowl that can later accommodate the pasta.
3. Add the ricotta, milk, and Parmigiano to the bowl and season with salt and pepper. Mix the ingredients thoroughly with a large spoon until you have a soft, loose mixture. If your mixture is too thick, add a bit more milk or pasta cooking water.
4. Drain spaghetti, leaving just a little bit of water attached to its strands, and place in the bowl. Mix well, taste, and adjust the seasoning if needed, and serve at once.

Serves 4 to 6

# Fresh Tomato Sauce with Ricotta Cheese and Basil

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## Sugo di Pomodoro e Ricotta

This is one of the simplest and most delicious summer tomato sauces—fragrant ripe tomatoes, a bit of garlic, a handful of green basil, and a small amount of ricotta or goat cheese. The addition of cheese gives the sauce a sweeter taste.

2 pounds juicy ripe tomatoes  
1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil, more if needed  
2 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed  
Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste  
1/2 cup ricotta cheese or goat cheese  
1 cup loosely packed shredded fresh basil  
1 pound spaghetti

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the tomatoes and simmer until the skin begins to split. Transfer tomatoes to a bowl of cold water and remove the skin. Cut tomatoes in half and remove the seeds and then cut into chunks and purée through a food mill or in a food processor.
2. Heat the oil in a medium-size saucepan on medium heat. Add the garlic and cook until it is golden and soft. Discard the garlic. Add the tomatoes, season with salt and pepper, and cook, uncovered over medium heat, for 10 to 12 minutes or until the sauce begins to thicken. Add the ricotta and stir until it is dissolved. Add the basil, stir once or twice, and turn off the heat.
3. Meanwhile, cook spaghetti in boiling salted water according to package directions.
4. Put half of the tomato sauce in a large warm serving bowl. Drain pasta, add to the bowl, and stir to combine. Serve with a little more sauce, if you wish.

Serves 4 to 6



# Fresh and Sun-Dried Tomatoes with Pecorino Cheese

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## Pomodori con Aglio, Peperoncino e Pecorino

This is a delightful and very appetizing sauce that one can find in the trattorie of Southern Italy. The pasta can be spaghetti, large rigatoni, or shells and the cheese is generally Pecorino Romano, a great Roman cheese.

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil  
2 pounds ripe plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and diced  
2 tablespoons oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, minced  
2 cloves garlic, chopped  
Salt, to taste  
Chopped fresh red chili pepper or hot red pepper flakes, to taste  
2 tablespoons minced parsley  
1 pound spaghetti  
1 cup grated Pecorino Romano cheese or Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

1. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the plum tomatoes and cook, stirring, for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, salt, and chili pepper and stir for a minute or two.
2. Reduce the heat to medium low and simmer 3 to 4 minutes, stirring the sauce a few times. Stir in the parsley during the last two minutes of cooking and turn off the heat.
3. Meanwhile, cook spaghetti in boiling salted water according to package directions. Drain spaghetti and add to the skillet and mix until pasta and sauce are well combined. Place the pasta into individual bowls, sprinkle generously with cheese, and serve.

Serves 4 to 6

# Mozzarella, Cherry Tomatoes, and Basil Capri Style

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## Spaghetti con Bufalo Mozzarella, Pomodorini e Basilico

Ripe tomatoes, mozzarella, olive oil, fresh herbs, and spaghetti are synonymous with the food of Naples and the Campania region. On cool days, this delicious sauce is generally briefly cooked and served while hot. On warmer days, the same ingredients are mixed together into a large serving bowl and served at room temperature. The pasta is cooked and added to the hot or cool ingredients.

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil

2 pounds cherry tomatoes washed, dried, and cut in half

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

2 cloves garlic, minced

10 to 12 basil leaves, shredded

1 pound spaghetti

1/2 pound mozzarella di Bufala or whole cow's milk mozzarella, diced

1. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the tomatoes, season with salt and pepper, and stir until tomatoes begin to soften, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the garlic and basil and stir for 1 to 2 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, cook spaghetti in boiling salted water according to package directions.
3. Drain spaghetti and add to the skillet and add the mozzarella. Briefly mix until mozzarella begins to soften, 1 to 2 minutes. Taste, adjust the seasoning, and serve.

Serves 4 to 6

# Pancetta, Eggs, Parmigiano, and Mascarpone Cheese

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## Pancetta, Uova, Parmigiano e Mascarpone

One of my very favorite pasta dishes is Spaghetti alla Carbonara, made with raw eggs, bacon, and Parmigiano. One night when my grandchildren came over for dinner I stirred a few ounces of mascarpone that I happened to have in my refrigerator into the eggs and Parmigiano. The sweetness of the mascarpone cheese paired with the more assertive ingredients made this dish so appetizing that no one at the table talked until the pasta on their plate was gone.

- 1 pound spaghetti
- 2 whole eggs
- 2 egg yolks
- 1 cup mascarpone cheese (about 5 ounces)
- 3/4 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, divided
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1/4 pound thickly sliced pancetta, cut into 1-inch dice

1. Cook spaghetti in boiling salted water according to package directions.
2. Meanwhile, in a large warm bowl that can later accommodate the pasta, add the eggs, mascarpone, and half of the Parmigiano. Season with salt and a generous amount of pepper and mix well to combine.
3. Heat the oil in a large skillet. Add the pancetta and stir over medium heat until just barely golden, about 1 minute.
4. Drain spaghetti, leaving just a little bit of water attached to its strands, and add to the skillet. Stir until pasta is well coated with the oil and pancetta. Add the contents of the skillet into the bowl and mix well to combine. Taste, adjust the seasonings, and serve with a sprinkle of Parmigiano.

**Note:** When raw eggs are stirred in a warm bowl with a hot pasta, they are semicooked by the heat of the pasta. Make sure to buy the freshest eggs possible.

Serves 4 to 6

# Pancetta, Hot Pepper, Olive Oil, and Pecorino

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**Pancetta, Peperoncino, Olio di Oliva e Pecorino**

This is a typical dish of Rome; a dish that peasants, laborers, and well-to-do people all seem to totally love. This is also one of the first dishes I order when I arrive in Rome. Because the sauce can be made in the time the pasta cooks, prepare the ingredients ahead of time, and then dazzle your family or friends with this quintessential Roman dish.

1 pound spaghetti  
1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil  
4 tablespoons unsalted butter  
1 cup minced yellow onion  
6 ounces thickly sliced pancetta, diced  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
A generous pinch of hot red pepper flakes  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley  
1 cup grated Pecorino Romano cheese, divided  
Salt, to taste

1. Cook spaghetti in boiling salted water according to package directions. When pasta is almost done, scoop up and reserve 1/2 cup of the cooking water.
2. Meanwhile, heat the oil and butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and stir until it is pale yellow and soft then add the pancetta. Stir gently until pancetta is lightly golden. Add the garlic and red pepper flakes and stir for about 1 minute. Turn off the heat.
3. Drain spaghetti, leaving just a little water attached to its strands, and place in the skillet. Toss spaghetti with the sauce, parsley, 1/3 cup of the Pecorino Romano cheese, and season lightly with salt. Mix over low heat until pasta is well coated. Add some of the reserved pasta water if needed. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Serve piping hot with a bit more cheese, if desired.

Serves 4 to 6

# Pancetta, Eggs, Peas, and Parmigiano

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## Pancetta, Uova, Piselli e Parmigiano

Spaghetti with pancetta, eggs, and cheese is a traditional Roman dish—one that is quite famous in many parts of the world today. Here, the golden pancetta, eggs, and Parmigiano cheese have the addition of fresh peas which bestow additional flavor on an already great dish.

3 whole eggs

2 egg yolks

1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, divided

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

1 pound spaghetti

1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil

1/4 pound thickly sliced pancetta, cut into 1/2-inch dice

1 cup fresh shelled peas, parboiled, or thawed frozen peas

1. In a large warm bowl that can later accommodate the pasta, beat the eggs with the yolks and 1/2 cup of the Parmigiano cheese. Season with salt and a generous amount of pepper and set aside.
2. Meanwhile, cook spaghetti in boiling salted water according to package directions.
3. While the pasta is cooking, warm the oil in a small skillet over medium heat. Add the pancetta and stir until lightly golden. Add the peas and stir for 1 or 2 minutes or until they are heated through. Turn off the heat under the skillet.
4. Drain pasta and place in the bowl with the eggs. Add the pancetta-pea sauce and a little more Parmigiano. Quickly mix until pasta is thickly coated with the sauce. Taste, adjust the seasoning and serve with additional cheese, if desired.

Serves 4 to 6



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