

## A Fresh and Classic Pasta Sauce

**M**aurizio Mazzon started cooking in restaurants at age 15, but he was working in the kitchen long before that. Born in the Veneto region of Italy, he grew up in a home with a garden full of vegetables, where the pasta was always hand made.

"In Italy, you start from the day you're born," says Mazzon. "I was the guy selected to turn the handle of the pasta maker to make the pasta." He is now executive chef of Il Fornaio restaurants, with local locations in Beverly Hills, Manhattan Beach, Pasadena and Woodland Hills.

Mazzon says that teaching kids about ingredients – the difference between ripe and green tomatoes and the smell of fresh versus dried herbs – is a great way to introduce them to cooking. "That's the whole basis of understanding food," he says. "When you have fresh, there is no other choice."

In this simple tomato sauce recipe, Mazzon says fresh tomatoes are ideal as long as they are truly ripe – almost overripe. They will make the sauce sweet, while under-ripe tomatoes will make it taste acidic. If good, fresh tomatoes aren't available, he recommends canned San Marzano tomatoes. "They come directly from Italy. That's the best," he says.



But Marzano allows no substitutions for the fresh herbs. "Don't even do the tomato sauce if you don't have fresh basil," he advises.

If you don't have a food mill at home, you can leave the sauce chunky or pulse briefly in a blender. Don't use a food processor, which will break up the tomato seeds and turn the sauce acidic.

This sauce can be used with any sort of pasta you like.

– Christina Elston

### Tomato Sauce (Salsi di Pomodoro) from Il Fornaio

2 pounds ripe tomatoes or one 28-ounce can whole peeled tomatoes with their juice

3 tablespoons olive oil

½ medium onion, diced

2 garlic cloves, smashed

½ dried peperoncino (chili pepper), broken into small pieces

6 fresh medium basil leaves, torn into small pieces

1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano (optional)

¾ teaspoon sea salt

¾ teaspoon freshly ground pepper

**If you are using fresh tomatoes:** Bring 4 quarts of water to a boil in a large stockpot. Cut a small X in the bottom of each tomato.

Drop the tomatoes into the boiling water and remove after 15-20 seconds. Let cool slightly, peel and cut out the core. Cut each tomato in half and, using your thumb, scoop out the seeds. Cut into quarters. Set aside.

**If you are using canned tomatoes:** Pour the tomatoes with their juice into a large bowl and break the tomatoes into smaller pieces with your hands. Set aside.

Heat the olive oil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the onion, garlic and peperoncino. Cook until the onion is tender, 3-5 minutes. Add the tomatoes, basil, oregano (if using), salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to a simmer and cook, uncovered, 30 minutes. Remove from the heat and transfer to a food mill. Purée over a bowl. Use immediately or store, refrigerated, in an airtight container.

Makes approximately 2 cups. ♦



Executive Chef Maurizio Mazzon of Il Fornaio restaurants says that fresh ingredients are the key to understanding food.