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spaghetti bolognese

adapted from Anne Burrell

prep time: 30 min
cook time: 4 hr 30 min
ready in: 5 hr

servings: 4

ingredients:

- 2 carrots, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch dice
- 1 medium onion, cut into 1/2-inch dice
- 3 ribs celery, cut into 1/2-inch dice
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- kosher salt

- 2 pounds ground beef (preferably 90/10 lean-to-fat ratio)
- 3 6-ounce cans tomato paste
- 2 cups hearty red wine

- 3 bay leaves
- 3 sprigs of thyme, tied in a bundle
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- water

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- 1 pound thick spaghetti
- 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 1/4 cup fresh basil leaves, chiffonade or tear
- good quality extra-virgin olive oil, for finishing

directions:

Using a food processor or blender, purée the carrots, onions, celery, and garlic into a coarse paste.

In a large heavy-bottomed French or Dutch oven, heat the oil over medium high heat. Add the puréed vegetables and season generously with salt. Stirring frequently, cook until all the water has evaporated and brown bits start forming on the bottom of the pan, about 15-20 minutes.

Add the ground beef and season again generously with salt. Stirring frequently, brown the beef for another 15-20 minutes.

Stir in the tomato paste and cook on medium heat for about 5 minutes until brown bits start forming on the bottom of the pan again.

Add the red wine and turn up the heat to medium-high. Reduce the wine by half, another 5 minutes.

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Add enough water to the pan so there is 1-inch of liquid above the meat, about 2 cups. Toss in the bay leaves and bundle of thyme and stir to combine everything. Sprinkle in the sugar and bring the sauce to a boil and reduce to a simmer, stirring occasionally.

As the liquid evaporates, gradually add more water, 2 cups at a time, and let it reduce to develop the flavors. Stir and taste occasionally and season with salt, if needed. Simmer for 3 1/2 to 4 hours.

During the last 30 minutes of cooking, bring a large stockpot of water to a boil over high heat. Generously salt the water and cook the spaghetti for 1 minute less than the time required for al dente as indicated on the package instructions. Reserve 1/2 cup of the pasta water.

While the pasta is cooking, transfer 1/2 of the bolognese sauce to a large tupperware or storage container and reserve. Be sure to discard the bay leaves and bundle of thyme. (Leftover bolognese can be used to make lasagna bolognese and/or stored in the freezer for a quick go-to meal any day of the week.)

Drain the pasta and add to the pot with the remaining bolognese sauce. Stir to combine.

Add the reserved pasta water and cook the pasta with the sauce until al dente, tossing frequently.

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Turn off the heat and sprinkle 1/4 cup of Parmigiano-Reggiano over the pasta. Drizzle with good quality extra-virgin olive oil and toss to combine. Add some of the reserved bolognese sauce if needed, for an even ratio of pasta-to-sauce.

Divide the pasta among 4 serving platters. Garnish with the remaining grated Parmigiano-Reggiano and basil.

notes:

Since basil tends to bruise easily, wait until the last minute to prepare the basil garnish. You can stack up the basil leaves, roll them tightly like a cigar, and use a sharp knife to chiffonade or cut the basil into fine ribbons. Note that a steel knife will oxidize the basil quite rapidly and turn the cut edges of the basil black. Simply tearing the basil leaves by hand will slow down the oxidation process and will provide your dish with a more rustic look.

A splatter screen really comes in handy at this point. Once the liquid starts to reduce, the bolognese will begin to bubble and splatter everywhere unless you have something covering the pot. You don't want to place a lid on the pot because then the liquid won't be able to evaporate. Since a splatter screen is made out of a fine mesh, the liquid can still evaporate, but the erupting sauce won't splatter all over the stove, kitchen walls, and most important of all, you!

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