

What do I need to make passata?

Ingredients

- Lots of ripe 'saucing' tomatoes. Roma tomatoes are by far the best, but other fleshy tomatoes are also good. If you are making a small amount, you can use the glut from your garden or buy them by the kilo from your greengrocer. For larger amounts, the cheapest way to go is to purchase them by the box. For every 10 kilograms of fruit will you make around eight litres of passata. Only purchase tomatoes a few days before you intend to use them. Remove and discard any overripe tomatoes. If the weather is warm, and you have the space, refrigerate the rest.
- Vegetable oil (one tablespoon per bottle made), fresh basil leaves, salt, and chilli if desired.

Equipment

- Glass (beer or juice) bottles, and new caps. If you can't rummage up enough through your network, these can be purchased from Italian catering suppliers. The jars can be recycled from year to year after you have made an initial investment. Any sized jars that you have to hand can be used, but ensure that caps are free from rust and dirt.
- A 'sauce machine' (known in Italian as a passapomodoro), which separates the skins and seeds from the tomato flesh. For small batches or occasional sauce making, you can purchase a small, cheaply available tin variety. Alternatively, a Mouli or even a domestic blender (if you don't mind the skins and seeds blended through) can be used. If you are making bulk amounts year after year, an industrial or electric sauce machine may be a good investment. Most Italian catering shops can show you a variety, ranging from 'cheap' to 'champion'.
- At least one stock pot to boil the passata in (more if you are making a large amount)
- Clean large plastic containers or large bowls to wash the tomatoes in and to 'catch' the sauce as it comes out of the saucing machine.
- A funnel and jug to pour the passata into the bottles.

The passata is best made outside, as it can get quite messy. A table to work on helps, as does a covered-over area in case of rain.

People power!

Once you have selected a day to do it, invite a bunch of people, friends, neighbours and family to help out. Use a 'call to arms' if you wish via your favourite social networking tool. Decide who will do what. Someone might be in charge of sourcing the tomatoes prior to the day. Someone might be in charge of ensuring that there are enough bottles and caps.

The number of people really depends on the amount you make. It may be that you team up with a three families or friends, for example, and agree that the sauce will be split three ways.

Sunshine is not mandatory, but it helps. The tomatoes like it, and so will your helpers.

How can I do it?

The following method is one that we use at home. It is simple and straightforward, and is conducive to making both small and large amounts.

1. Wash bottles and caps with dishwashing liquid and water, or run through the dishwasher. Ensure that caps are rust or grime free if you have not bought them new. Bottles and caps should be dry before you cap them. Put these aside in a box in a cool dry place until you are ready to use them.
2. Wash the tomatoes in a big basin and cut the tops off. Cut these in half and place in a large bowl or container. Sprinkle a generous amount of salt (roughly three teaspoons of salt per 5kg) over the top. Leave these in the sun for half an hour, allowing the juice to run off the tomato.
3. Pass the tomatoes in small batches through your sauce machine, leaving the seeds and skin behind. Allow the sauce to run off in a bucket or container below the sauce machine. You will need to pass the discarded skins back through the machine a couple of times, to ensure that all of the juice has come away. This is quite a labour-intensive process, and if you have a large amount, may take some hours. Alternatively, blend the tomatoes in a blender in small batches (unorthodox by Italian standards, but it does the trick).

4. Transfer the tomato pulp to a large stockpot and bring to the boil. Once bubbling, cook for approximately one hour. Towards the end of the process, add whole fresh basil leaves and chilli if desired.
5. When the passata is nearly done, lay a batch of bottles and caps in the oven at 200 degrees Celsius for 15 minutes to sterilise the bottles. Carefully place these in the box that the tomatoes came in, uncapped. Use a jug and funnel to pour hot sauce into the bottles. Leave 2 centimetres from the top of the bottle, and cover with half a centimeter of oil. Cap tightly and store in a cool, dry place. When used for cooking, this sauce will need to be reduced for a further 10 minutes on low heat.
6. Now, this is the best bit – throw on a tonne of pasta, tip a bottle of last year’s passata into a saucepan, crack open the homemade wine, and have a feast. Buon Appetito.

Variation

There are many different ways to make tomato sauce, from a very juicy uncooked style, to a very intense tomato paste, as well as different ways of sterilizing your bottles by boiling for example. Many Italians briefly boil the whole tomatoes before passing them through the sauce machine, and for very large amounts of sauce, they will use a 44-gallon oil drum with a fire underneath.

If you want to find out more about the myriad variations on making passata, and the ins and outs of preserving Italian-style, Dr Demaio Petro’s *Preserving the Italian Way* is most helpful. For a sumptuous visual tour, you can’t go past the website Mangia! Mangia! (www.mangiamangia.com.au) – Bellissimo!

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