

Delfina's Spaghetti Pomodoro

Serves 4-5

Sixteen years after opening Delfina, the restaurant's signature spaghetti remains on the menu, a simple dish with a cult following. The secret is partially cooking the pasta in water and finishing it in the sauce. You'll have extra sauce; it freezes well.

2 (28-ounce) cans peeled whole plum tomatoes (such as Di Napoli)

3 cups water

5 garlic cloves, peeled

Kosher salt

½ cup extra virgin olive oil

Freshly ground pepper to taste

Hot red pepper flakes to taste

Leaves from ½ bunch fresh basil

1 pound high-quality durum wheat spaghetti (such as Rustichella d'Abruzzo)

1½ ounces "finishing" (flavorful, high-quality) extra virgin olive oil

Freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Instructions: Remove the tomatoes from the can, one at a time. Break each one open and scrape out the seeds with your hand, allowing the juice and seeds to fall back into the can. Drop the seeded tomatoes into a bowl.

When all the tomatoes are seeded, break them up with your hands and strain the juice from the cans back over them. Pour the 3 cups of water into the cans, then pour that through the strainer into the bowl with the tomatoes.

Place the garlic cloves on a cutting board. Smash each one with the side of a chef's knife and smear it slightly with a sprinkling of kosher salt.

Scrape the smashed garlic and salt into an

8-quart heavy-bottom pot. Add the olive oil, set over medium-low heat, cover and stew slowly until the garlic is soft and melted in texture but not browned, about 10 minutes.

Add the tomatoes along with their juice and the water to the pot. Season with some salt, pepper and a touch of hot red pepper flakes. Turn the heat to high and bring to a boil, skimming the foam but not the oil. Reduce the heat to medium-high and cook, uncovered, until the oil has emulsified with the rest of the ingredients and the sauce has reduced by approximately two thirds, about 40 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in ⅔ of the basil leaves. You should have about 5 cups of sauce.

Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook for 5 minutes—it will not be cooked through. Drain and reserve a large coffee mug (10-12 ounces) of the pasta cooking water.

Ladle about 3 cups of the sauce into the pasta pot. (Save the remaining 2 cups for another use.) Add the partially cooked pasta to the sauce, along with about 8 ounces of the pasta cooking water and bring to a boil. Continue to cook rapidly for approximately 7 more minutes, tossing and stirring to prevent sticking to the bottom of the pot. Add more pasta water if the pasta needs to cook a little more.

This process allows the pasta to absorb some of the sauce. Additionally, the pasta releases starch which thickens the sauce and helps it cling to the pasta. This way it doesn't run off of the spaghetti and sit on the bottom of the bowl. The last bite of pasta should bring the last bit of sauce with it.

Adjust the seasoning with salt, pepper and red pepper flakes to taste, and drizzle with the finishing extra virgin olive oil. Roughly tear the remaining basil leaves and toss them in.

Divide between serving plates, and top with lots of freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano.

Per serving: 613 calories, 15 g protein, 82 g carbohydrates, 25 g fat (4 g saturated), 0 mg cholesterol, 314 mg sodium, 10 g fiber.