Prep Time	5 minutes
Cook Time	25 minutes
Total Time	30 minutes
Yield	4 servings
Difficulty	Easy
Cuisine	Italian-American

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Ingredients

For the pasta:

- 1 lb (454 g) dried spaghetti noodles

- 4 quarts (3.8 L) water
- 1½ tablespoons kosher salt (or 1 tablespoon table salt)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (optional, for the pot)

For the tomato sauce:

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small yellow onion, finely diced (about ¾ cup)
- 4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 1 can (28 oz / 800 g) crushed San Marzano tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon dried basil (or ¼ cup fresh basil, added at the end)
- ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)

- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon granulated sugar (optional, to balance acidity)
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for serving
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter (the secret to glossy sauce)
- ½ cup reserved pasta water

For serving:

- Fresh basil leaves
- Grated Parmesan or Pecorino Romano
- Extra drizzle of olive oil
- Fresh cracked black pepper

Equipment Needed

- Large pot (6–8 quart) for boiling pasta
- Large skillet or sauté pan (12 inch) for the sauce
- Wooden spoon or silicone spatula
- Tongs (essential for transferring pasta)
- Liquid measuring cup (for reserving pasta water)
- Colander (optional — tongs work better)
- Chef’s knife and cutting board

Instructions

Step 1: Boil the Water — *Time: 8–10 minutes | Intensity: Low (passive)*

Fill a large pot with 4 quarts of water and bring it to a rolling boil over high heat. Covering the pot speeds this up significantly. Add the salt once boiling — the water should taste pleasantly salty, like the sea. This is your only chance to season the pasta from the inside out.

Step 2: Start the Sauce — *Time: 3 minutes* | *Intensity: Medium*

While the water heats, warm the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the diced onion and cook for 4–5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until soft and translucent — not browned. Add the sliced garlic and cook for 30–45 seconds more, just until fragrant. Burnt garlic turns bitter, so keep it moving.

Step 3: Build the Tomato Base — *Time: 5 minutes* | *Intensity: Medium*

Stir in the tomato paste and cook for 1 minute to caramelize its sugars and deepen the flavor. Add the crushed tomatoes, oregano, dried basil, red pepper flakes, salt, pepper, and sugar (if using). Stir well, scraping up anything stuck to the pan. Bring to a gentle simmer.

Step 4: Simmer the Sauce — *Time: 12–15 minutes* | *Intensity: Low*

Reduce the heat to low and simmer uncovered for 12–15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the sauce thickens slightly and the flavors meld. Taste and adjust salt. If the sauce thickens too much, add a splash of the pasta water.

Step 5: Cook the Spaghetti — *Time: 9–11 minutes* | *Intensity: Low–Medium*

Once the water boils, add the spaghetti. Stir immediately with tongs for the first 30 seconds to prevent sticking, then stir occasionally. Cook for 1 minute less than the package directions — the pasta will finish cooking in the sauce. Before draining, scoop out and reserve 1 cup of pasta water. This starchy liquid is liquid gold for binding the sauce.

Step 6: Combine Pasta and Sauce — *Time: 2 minutes* | *Intensity:*

Medium

Using tongs, transfer the spaghetti directly from the pot into the skillet of sauce (this carries over a little starchy water too). Add ½ cup of the reserved pasta water and toss vigorously over medium heat for 1–2 minutes until the sauce clings to every strand. The pasta will absorb the sauce and finish cooking to perfect al dente.

Step 7: Finish with Butter and Parmesan — *Time: 1 minute* | *Intensity: Low*

Remove the skillet from the heat. Add the butter and Parmesan and toss until melted and glossy. This final “mantecatura” step is what gives restaurant-quality pasta its silky, emulsified sauce that coats each noodle. Add more pasta water a splash at a time if it looks dry.

Step 8: Serve — *Time: 1 minute* | *Intensity: Low*

Twirl portions onto warmed plates or into bowls. Top with fresh basil, extra Parmesan, a drizzle of olive oil, and cracked black pepper. Serve immediately — pasta waits for no one.

Time & Intensity Summary

Phase	Duration	Intensity
Boil water	8–10 minutes	Low (passive)
Start sauce	3 minutes	Medium
Build tomato base	5 minutes	Medium
Simmer sauce	12–15 minutes	Low
Cook spaghetti	9–11 minutes	Low–Medium
Combine pasta & sauce	2 minutes	Medium
Finish with butter & Parmesan	1 minute	Low

Phase	Duration	Intensity
Serve	1 minute	Low
Total	~30 minutes	Easy

Note: Water boiling and sauce simmering overlap, which is why total time is shorter than the sum of all phases.

Nutrition Information (Per Serving — ¼ of recipe)

Nutrient	Amount
Calories	545 kcal
Total Fat	15 g
Saturated Fat	5 g
Cholesterol	15 mg
Sodium	780 mg
Total Carbohydrates	84 g
Dietary Fiber	6 g
Total Sugars	9 g
Protein	17 g
Calcium	120 mg
Iron	4 mg
Vitamin C	15% DV