

- Prep time: 15 minutes
 - Cook time: 1 hour 10 minutes (total)
 - Yield: About 6 cups (1.5 L) — serves 6-8
 - Difficulty: Easy
 - Cuisine: Italian-American
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Ingredients

- 3 tbsp (45 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely diced (about 1 cup)
- 4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 2 tbsp (30 g) tomato paste
- 2 cans (28 oz / 794 g each) whole peeled San Marzano tomatoes, crushed by hand
- 1 tsp fine sea salt (plus more to taste)
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- ½ tsp red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1 small bunch fresh basil (stems and leaves separated)
- 1 tbsp (15 g) unsalted butter (optional, for finishing)

- 1 tsp balsamic vinegar (optional, for balancing acidity)
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Equipment

- Heavy-bottomed Dutch oven or large saucepan (at least 5 qt / 4.7 L)
 - Wooden spoon
 - Chef's knife and cutting board
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Step-by-Step Instructions

Stage 1 — Sweat the Aromatics (8-10 minutes | Medium-Low Heat)

1. Heat the oil in your Dutch oven over medium-low heat for 1-2 minutes, until it shimmers but doesn't smoke.
2. Add the onion and a pinch of salt. Cook for 6-7 minutes, stirring occasionally, until soft and translucent — not browned. If the onions start to color, lower the heat.

3. Add the garlic and cook for 1–2 minutes more, until fragrant. Do not let it brown.

Intensity note: Medium-low is key here. You're building a sweet base, not caramelizing.

Stage 2 — Bloom the Tomato Paste (2-3 minutes | Medium Heat)

4. Push the onions to one side and add the tomato paste to the cleared space. Raise the heat to medium.
5. Fry the paste for 2–3 minutes, stirring constantly, until it darkens to a brick red and smells sweet. This step is non-negotiable — it deepens the sauce dramatically.

Stage 3 — Build the Sauce (5 minutes | Medium Heat)

6. Add the crushed tomatoes, salt, pepper, oregano, and red pepper flakes (if using). Stir to combine and scrape up any browned bits.
7. Add the basil stems (tie them in a bundle for easy removal). Bring to a gentle simmer — small bubbles breaking at the surface, not a rolling boil.

Stage 4 — The Long Simmer (45-50 minutes | Low Heat)

8. Reduce heat to low and partially cover the pot (leave the lid slightly ajar to allow evaporation).

9. Simmer for 45-50 minutes, stirring every 10-15 minutes. The sauce should reduce by about one-quarter and thicken enough to coat a spoon.

Intensity check: You want lazy, occasional bubbles — one or two per second at most. If it’s bubbling vigorously, drop the heat.

Time check: At 30 minutes, taste and adjust salt. At 45 minutes, remove the basil stems.

Stage 5 — Finish and Rest (5 minutes | Off Heat)

10. Remove the basil stems. Stir in the butter and balsamic vinegar (if using) — these round out the acidity and add silkiness.

11. Tear the fresh basil leaves and stir them in.

12. Rest off heat for 5 minutes before serving. The sauce tightens slightly as it cools.

Timing Summary Table

Stage	Time	Heat Intensity
Sweat onions	6-7 min	Medium-low
Add garlic	1-2 min	Medium-low
Bloom tomato paste	2-3 min	Medium
Build sauce	5 min	Medium
Simmer	45-50 min	Low
Finish & rest	5 min	Off heat

Nutrition Information

Per serving (based on 8 servings, $\sim\frac{3}{4}$ cup / 180 ml each, including butter):

- Calories: 145
- Total fat: 8 g (1.2 g saturated)
- Carbohydrates: 12 g
- Fiber: 3 g
- Sugars: 7 g
- Protein: 2.5 g
- Sodium: 480 mg
- Potassium: 540 mg
- Vitamin C: 22% DV
- Vitamin A: 10% DV

- Iron: 6% DV