

## Simple Italian Meat Sauce

Makes about 6 cups

You can figure on about 3 cups of sauce per pound of pasta. Except for ground round (which tasters found spongy and bland), this recipe will work with most types of ground beef, as long as it is 85 % lean. Use high quality crushed tomatoes; our favorite brands are Tuttosrosso and Muir Glen. If using dried oregano, add the entire amount with the canned tomato liquid in step 2.

4 ounces white mushrooms, wiped clean and broken into rough pieces

1 large slice high quality white sandwich bread, torn into quarters

2 tablespoon whole milk

Table salt and ground black pepper

1 lbs 85% lean ground beef (see note)

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 medium onion, minced

6 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 2 tablespoons)

1 tablespoon tomato paste

1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes

1 (14.5 ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained, 1/4 cup juice reserved

1 tablespoon minced fresh oregano leaves or 1 teaspoon dried oregano (see note)

1 (28 ounce) can crushed tomatoes (see note)

1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

1. Pulse the mushrooms in a food processor until finely chopped, about 8 pulses, scraping down the sides of the workbowl as needed; transfer to a medium bowl. Add the bread, milk, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon black pepper to the food processor and pulse until a paste forms, about 8 pulses. Add the beef and pulse until the mixture is well combined, about 6 pulses.

2. Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium high heat until just smoking. Add the onion and mushrooms; cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables are browned and dark bits form on the pan bottom, 6 to 12 minutes. Stir in the garlic, tomato paste, and red pepper flakes; cook until fragrant and the tomato paste starts to brown, about 1 minute. Add the 1/4 cup reserved tomato juice and 2 teaspoons of the the fresh oregano (if using dried, add the full amount), scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon to loosen the browned bits. Add the meat mixture and cook, breaking the meat into small pieces with a wooden spoon, until no longer pink, 2 to 4 minutes, making sure that the meat does not brown.

3. Stir in the diced and crushed tomatoes and bring to a simmer; reduce the heat to low and gently simmer until the sauce has thickened and the flavors have blended, about 30 minutes. Stir in the cheese and the remaining 1 teaspoon fresh oregano; season with salt and pepper to taste. (The sauce can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 3 days or frozen for up to 1 month).