



**PASSATA,
WHAT A PASSION!**

**#STR
APAS
SATA**

CAMPIONATO TRE SPADE
PASSATA DI POMODORO



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STRAPASSATA: tomatoes before and after

Recognised throughout the world for its colour, aroma and goodness, in Italy it is also known as salsa di pomodoro, pummarola, conserva, selsa ed pomdòr, la chenzèrve... Whatever you call it, tomato sauce always represents a moment of sharing, a tradition, a ritual and tasty feast of a thousand colours. It is a product that celebrates the Mediterranean diet and the return to good things in their simplest form. Strapassata is the competition set up by Tre Spade to celebrate Italian cuisine and tomato sauce. It is a unique initiative dedicated to this ancient but timeless ritual, which is repeated year after year, comparing tradition and modernity, rituals and creativity, and involving all generations of the family, friends and neighbours. Strapassata has collected recipes and stories about tomato sauce that have been shared by lovers of the taste of good food and conviviality. Twenty of them appear in this book. An exclusive collection that aims to express the joy of Italians in bringing the true flavour of the legendary passata to the table. Preparing it, is a gesture of love for oneself and others. Furthermore, it is a ritual that links the past with the future, where everyday life and the pleasure of cooking shape our memories that re-emerge in the form of exquisite recipes and memorable stories.

Tre Spade was founded in 1894 in the lush Canavese area in the province of Turin. Since then it has been the reference brand for enthusiasts and taste professionals, to whom it provides equipment for processing and preserving food, working every day with care, commitment and imagination.

THE ANCIENT FORMULA OF A NEVER OUTDATED RITUAL

Summer means passata, concentrated in gestures, scents and colours. Sun, water, dedication and the ancient formula of a recurring ritual, which has the flavour of a suspended and circular time. The plot is by no means weak and what you see is just a clue, of when we find ourselves once again immersed in life. We and those from whom we have absorbed the passion, those who were parents and ancestors, are now smiling somewhere, as they watch us do the same things. We cultivate the seedlings in spring, we watch them grow during the following months and we transform their fruits at the end of August. This is in order to have that glow in our plates throughout the year. When we bury them in the fragile furrows, the summer and their party are still only a promise. Caring for them consists mainly of watering, trust, and time. When harvest time arrives, the preparations start, memories mixed with chatter, glass rattling in vats and wood ready to burn under pots. The recipe is simple. Let the washed, cut and partially seeded tomatoes, shrivel up in the pot without water, taking care not to burn them by stirring quickly. We pass them through the tomato press repeatedly until we obtain a full-bodied nectar, add salt to it and then fill the jars. Then we pasteurise them by boiling for an hour and a half on a high heat. Once they are cold, usually after a day, we arrange them neatly in the pantry. Only two ingredients but, if we think of the heart as a vessel that is filled up and of love as a fire to be lit, they are also irreplaceable.

Margherita Caserta, Forino (Avellino)



SMOKED PASSATA

All that nature has of great, all it has of pleasant, all it has of terrible, can be compared to Etna and Etna cannot be compared to anything. This is the passionate description of the highest active volcano in Europe, written by Dominique Vivant Denon during his visit in 1778, which summarises the volcano, mythology, geology, history and its people. Indeed, over the centuries, Mount Etna, with its eruptions and paroxysms, similar to those of today, as well as its sand and lapilli, has produced extremely fertile soils, in which spontaneous and cultivated plants easily take root, continue to grow and thrive. Even the emissions of gases, vapours and metal micro-particles that accumulate in the soil, contribute to the richness of the land. The people of Etna are hard-working, especially those who live in the villages located on its flanks. Almost every house has its own small vegetable garden that produces an infinite variety of fruit and vegetables. My family has one too. When summer comes, it is an explosion of colours and scents. Oregano, basil, parsley, thyme and mint. Then there are the aubergines, peppers, courgettes, onions and tomatoes. Ah yes, the tomatoes! Many families continue the tradition of making tomato preserves: dried tomatoes and "astrattu", a concentrate made from tomato passata dried in the Sicilian sun. Lastly, these preserves, sealed in glass jars which are sterilised in boiling water for at least 40 minutes, will be used throughout the year. Once upon a time, several families joined forces and prepared the preserves outdoors, even in side streets little used by cars. Still nowadays, this ritual is almost sacred and, when the tomatoes ripen, at least for a day, the family stops what they are doing and everyone rallies round to make the preserves. Today we have electric tomato presses and large gas stoves so just one day of hard work is

enough to prepare a year's supply. Obviously, my family also made the classic preserves such as passata, "chopped tomatoes" and peeled plum tomatoes. Today, in the late afternoon, we have filled the cauldron with water, placed the jars in it and lit the fire. Then we spent time cleaning the equipment to be used and prepared a "quick" dinner while waiting for the water to boil. Whilst we were getting everything ready, we suddenly heard a loud explosion. Where we live, an explosion can mean only one thing: "scassau a muntagna", i.e. "Etna has exploded". It should be mentioned that Mount Etna is the only volcano that has a female name; it is also called "Mongibello". This name comes from the combination of two words: the Latin "Mons", and the Arabic "jebel"; it's like saying "mountain-mountain" or "mountain of mountains". In dialect, we call it "a Muntagna" i.e. the "mountain par excellence". The explosions and the subsequent ejection of lapilli and lava, the fumes and vapours that accompanied the eruption and the fire of the brazier that was to be used to roast the vegetables and entrecote steaks, gave us the idea of preparing a different type of passata: "smoked passata". No sooner said than done, also because having a son who is an agronomist is a great help in these kinds of situations! We had already lit the almond shell charcoal, which gave off a strong but delicate aroma. We then placed the tomatoes on the cooking grids, separately and according to size: the "riccio catanese", the "tondo liscio" and a few "siccagno" from Valledolmo on one grid and the "cherry" and "datterino" varieties on the others. The agronomist of the house had brought these last two varieties home a couple of days earlier when he went to carry out some on-site inspections in the province of Ragusa, which is an area of excellence for these products. We tossed oregano, thyme, basil, a diced red onion and a few grains of sea salt over the tomatoes. We then placed everything over the heat and covered it with a lid so that the fumes could penetrate deep



into the tomatoes and not just into the skins. After having cooked five grids, we stopped otherwise we wouldn't have had enough tomatoes left for the salad. Once we had reassembled the electric tomato press, which had already been washed and dried, we were ready to start making the smoked passata. The fumes of Etna, which stretched from the south-east crater to our homes, overlapped. Furthermore, they mixed and blended with the smoke emanating from the almond shell charcoal and enveloped the roasting tomatoes in a fiery embrace. We eliminated some skins that were completely charred and left the ones that were dry, but not completely burnt. Then we placed everything into the hopper of the tomato press, including the herbs and onion that had previously been sprinkled onto the tomatoes. A sheer bliss of aromas! The passata that slowly materialised, almost like an outflow of incandescent lava, gave off all the aromas of the tomatoes and aromatic herbs that had been added, as well as an intense, but pleasant, smoky scent. How did the evening end? We lit some more charcoal, grilled the entrecote steaks that we had set aside, which we obviously seasoned with some of the passata that we had just made and a "generous" drizzle of Etna extra virgin olive oil. We washed it all down with a few glasses of good red Etna DOC wine. Perhaps the same one with which Ulysses deceived Polyphemus? We don't know! What about the rest of the precious passata? We added a generous amount of oregano to a large part of it and put it in jars; we will boil them the following morning, not now, as too many fumes have clouded our minds! And "idda", she, i.e. Mount Etna, continues to rumble and light up this late summer night.

Luciano Signorello, Belpasso (Catania)

THE BATTISTA FAMILY'S PASSATA

Our tomatoes come directly from grandfather Gigi's vegetable garden. Once the tomatoes arrive home they are collected, placed in large basins and thoroughly washed by the whole family; after which we start to cut them and in the meantime, we chat. The waste is put aside and thrown away. Put the tomatoes into large pots and start cooking them. They have to be well cooked. Once cooked, the basil is dried and placed in the jars. Then the tomato press is set up and the tomatoes are put in it to separate the skin from the pulp. The skins come out from one side and the pulp from the other. The bottles and jars are filled using a tap made by our grandfather. Once full, they should be closed and laid side by side in layers separated by tea towels. The pot is then filled with water in order to create a vacuum and cook for about 40 minutes. We have made homemade pasta and have used our sauce to make the meat sauce... buon appetito!

Michele Battista, Nichelino (Torino)



THE MAGIC OF STRAW

Preparing our passata is a ritual that starts in mid-April, when Franco, as he has been doing for about thirty years, goes to Natale on the slopes of Vesuvio, to get the plants. He then plants them and “caresses” them until harvesting. The tomatoes are then left to ripen on a bed of straw until the day the sauce is prepared. The tomatoes are selected, washed and placed in a large pot to boil. They are then passed through the press twice and the resulting sauce is bottled. The tightly capped bottles are then boiled for about an hour. Of course, the entire family, grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles and grandchildren, takes part in the process. A great team to make a sauce with an exceptional flavour, which tastes of love, tradition, effort and enjoyment.

Rosa Rocchio, Capua (Caserta)



THE RITUAL OF TASTE

For anyone who lives or has lived in the countryside, it is a summer ritual that is repeated every year and to which unforgettable memories are linked. When I was a child, they used to give me the job of putting the basil leaves in the bottles or glass jars. I was only allowed to watch the rest of the proceedings. As I grew up, my “role” became more important, while my willingness to become involved evaporated. If nothing else, because of the wake-up call at dawn. In the countryside, all activities in the summer are carried out when it is cool. Here’s the step-by-step method.

Thoroughly wash the bottles and glass jars the day before (its best if you sterilise them in water). At dawn on the designated day, put a basil leaf in each bottle or jar. You can also half-fill the jars with Pachino cherry tomatoes if you like. At the same time, blanch the tomatoes in water and as soon as they are ready, put them to drain in wooden “scife” (tray) or perforated plastic crates. Then squeeze the blanched tomatoes in the tomato press to separate the pulp from the peel and seeds. This is the part I enjoy the most, but it is also the one where you get the most dirty, as it splashes everywhere. Use funnels and ladles to pour the sauce (to be salted to taste) into clean bottles and jars that will then be closed with caps. Then place the jars and bottles in a large pot full of water to boil for at least three hours. To prevent the jars from breaking during boiling, place pages from old newspapers between one layer and another.

Maria Rosaria Romano, Casoria (Napoli)

A MEMORY OF SUMMER

I am originally from Puglia although I have lived in Parma for many years, but every time I go home in the summer, I prepare the “winter supplies” together with my family: the sauce. My family’s recipe is very simple: it requires very few ingredients but commitment of everyone. First, the tomatoes are carefully selected and the stalks removed. They are then thoroughly washed and a cross is scored at the top of each tomato. In the meantime, the water that has already been put in the large pots is brought to the boil. The tomatoes are added and cooked for a few minutes until they float to the surface. Then they are drained using a colander and dried in wicker baskets with a clean cloth placed underneath, or on an inclined surface so that the liquid drains out. The tomatoes can now be pressed to extract the sauce, which will be placed in the already sterilised glass jars (obviously all different). Once closed, the jars should be placed in large pots and boiled. Tea towels should be placed between the jars to space them so that they don’t break. They should be boiled for at least 30–40 minutes and only removed once the water has been allowed to cool down slowly. The jars are then shared out between members of the family and seasoned only at the time of use. Its aroma is unique and contains the love for and of the family, as well as all the memories of the summer and the previous ones too.

Noemi Pellegrini, Parma





PASSATA AND CONCENTRATE, THE HOUSEWIVES' TREASURE.

I was very young when everything had to be kept carefully, trying not to throw anything away. The winter was long and you had to work hard during the summer in order to obtain the greatest possible supply. The tomatoes were left to ripen on the plants, then washed to remove any traces of verdigris and then dried. Often, to avoid excessive residues building up in the tomato press, the tomatoes were peeled after having been immersed in hot water. After having obtained the precious passata, some of it was bottled and sterilised. A large amount was poured into cotton sacks; even those that once contained rice were recycled. They were then hung up to drain. They seemed to bleed and ended up against the white walls to transform themselves into another life. When the consistency was thick enough, the concentrate was removed from the sack and poured into a large clay pot on the stove to be cooked quickly and sterilised. To be sure that the precious product was preserved properly, a few grams of salicylic acid, purchased at the chemists, just like a medicine together with dosage instructions, were added. Everything was then placed in jars to form the housewives' precious treasure.

Mariangela Bruno, Castellino Tanaro (Cuneo)

CHOPPED RIO BRASIL TOMATOES

For many years, during July and August, it has been a family tradition to make tomato passata in the “old-fashioned” way, very simply, just using tomatoes without any added flavourings or ingredients.

The tomatoes, which are used exclusively to make the passata, are planted between April and May. We buy “Rio Brasil” tomato seedlings, because the fruit has hardly any seeds, but mostly because they contain very little water. The method of cultivation is also special. The seedlings are planted about 50 cm apart and the ground is covered with a black plastic sheet to prevent the tomatoes resting on wet earth and discourage weeds. Drip irrigation pipes are then positioned close to the seedlings. A tepee trellis made of canes and plastic netting is then placed over the seedlings to support them as they grow. This allows the plants to remain upright and prevents the tomatoes crowding, but above all allows them to remain clean and harvested easily. This is because the tomatoes are never in contact with wet earth. The tomatoes are harvested gradually, according to how ripe they are. Once the tomatoes have been harvested, they are washed and cut into large chunks and placed directly in the tomato press. Ours is a magnificent “Tre Spade” machine that was bought by my father about 40 years ago. The entire family, adults and children alike, all take part in this task. The passata is then placed in glass jars that have already been washed and sterilised in the dishwasher. A wood fire is then prepared in the garden with screen around it to shield it from the wind and a sheet metal container (an old 200 kg oil drum) placed on it. All the jars of tomato are then placed inside it, immersed in water. You should put grass at the bottom of the drum and cotton cloths and bricks on top of



the jars to prevent them from moving whilst they are boiled, which lasts about an hour. This old method means that significantly less time is required compared to using pots on a gas stove.

After the jars have cooled down (overnight), they are removed from the drum and checked individually to make sure that a vacuum has been created.

In the end, the jars contain pure tomato passata (which resembles a dense mass) with 2–3 centimetres of vegetable liquid, residue of the passata, at the bottom. The amount of liquid at the bottom depends on the amount of water the tomatoes contained at the beginning. The liquid forms because we don't boil the tomatoes before pressing them, and we use the small amount of liquid they produce to prepare the various tomato-based sauces.

However, if we don't need this liquid, we suck it up from the bottom via a rubber tube connected to a large syringe, leaving the passata integral.

We make about 200 kg of passata, which is shared out among friends and relatives.

The strengths of our passata are:

1. The type of tomato used, low water content
2. The speed at which it is made
3. The simplicity of the finished product

At the end of all this however, appetite is the best sauce there is!

Maria Elena Del Ferro, Offagna (Ancona)

SAUCE AND CORN ON THE COB

I'm 32 years old and ever since I was about 6, practically a lifetime, I have taken part in the ritual of preparing tomato sauce. In my vivid childhood memories, I see Nonna Maria in pole position next to the large copper cauldron starting the "ritual" by blanching large vine tomatoes, the so-called San Marzano variety, after having carefully washed and cleaned them. After having been cooked for a short while they were placed in crates and covered with wide-weave cotton sheets, to let the excess water drain. We, the children of the house, in the meantime, picked the basil that we put at the bottom of each bottle. Then we moved on to the most exciting part of it all, pressing the tomatoes. At the time, I remember my grandmother standing behind a small hand-operated machine made of aluminium.... and from there, the magic started: the large pot began to fill up with a sauce that was such an intense red and so sweet that it was impossible not to want to taste it! Then my mother and aunt filled the bottles containing the basil and after having capped and sealed them, we boiled them in a bain-marie. This had to be strictly done in the garden. We took advantage of the small fire to roast peppers and corncobs! And what a fantastic taste that roasted, charred and super-hot corn on the cob had!

Each time you open a bottle you'll be able to smell the land and a uniqueness that is and difficult to erase. A memory that will accompany you everywhere and give you a "blow to the heart", a strong emotion just like when the bottles explode that were not arranged properly in the bin full of "mante" (blankets). A "catastrophe" according to our grandmother who, as usual, interpreted it as a bad omen.

For me this is what making tomato sauce means. Even today,

when we prepare it, I go back to being a little child and I lose myself in sweet childhood memories where everything was simple and easy!

Valentina Langone, Satriano di Lucania (Potenza)



A CEREMONY THAT NEVER GOES OUT OF FASHION

Making passata is a ritual for families living in the countryside around Naples. “La Pummarola” is a religion. In fact, it’s used in all or almost all Neapolitan dishes. Honestly, I can’t boast about having rural traditions in my family ... in fact, quite the opposite! However, I was lucky enough to live in the countryside close to town, next door to a family that had been farmers for generations. I learnt the true flavours of the land from them. Tomato passata is part of this wealth of memories and emotions that I carry with me. As a child, I remember these huge metal basins filled with dark bottles, the coolness of the cavity carved into the rock and the scent of basil.

INGREDIENTS

tomatoes, well washed
salt
basil

PREPARATION

Cut the tomatoes into wedges, only eliminating signs of mould or dark coloured areas. Put them to boil in a pot with basil and a pinch of salt, until all the water has been released, and let them boil for 10 minutes at the most. Remove the tomatoes using a skimmer, leaving the cooking water in the pot. Pass the tomatoes through a tomato press. The skins should be pressed again since they will still contain some pulp even after having been pressed once. Pour the passata into sterilised jars up to about the width of two fingers from the rim, close tightly. Boil the jars for at least 30 minutes, starting with cold water in order to create a vacuum. Separate the jars with a cloth if they are too close to one another.

After boiling, remove them quickly from the water and place them upside down to help the vacuum to form. Leave them to cool for at least 12 hours and then store in a cool place. Some tips: taking into account the skins, water and waste, the yield of tomatoes is about 50% - 55%. This allows you to calculate how many jars you will need! Sometimes the lids fail to create a vacuum. Arm yourself with patience and boil the jars again or change the lid. The jars should also be sterilised before adding the passata by boiling them for 30 minutes or placing them in the microwave for 3-4 minutes at maximum power with a drop of water. The lids should be boiled because they cannot be put in the microwave. The yield will be higher if you use juicy tomatoes. Low wide pots are better than tall ones as they allow the passata to cook more quickly. Throw away as little as possible, a soft tomato is a good tomato! This passata was made together with my family and the help of my dear friend Manuela, who took the photos. Friendship, like “la pummarola”, means family.

Jessica Di Fraia, Dozza (Bologna)



THE TYPE OF TOMATO IS IMPORTANT

INGREDIENTS

Tomatoes
Basil to taste
Salt to taste

Choosing the right type of tomato is essential when preparing passata. Here in my town, we have a very tasty oblong-shaped tomato that is often grown near the sea and watered with slightly brackish water. This type of tomato makes our sauce particularly thick and tasty. After selecting the best tomatoes, wash them thoroughly and drain. Score them vertically and place in a cooking pot. Once you have done this, add plenty of basil and cook over low heat for about 30 minutes until they sweat, stirring from time to time. Once cooked, pour the tomatoes into large colanders to drain the water. Now squeeze the tomatoes using an electric tomato press, which will make this step, which is the most tiring, much easier. You should then add salt to the passata and put it into glass containers that have been already sterilised. After bottling, we move on to the pasteurisation phase, which allows you to keep the product for longer. Place the tightly closed containers in a large pot with hot water and leave them to boil on a low heat for about 40 minutes. Lastly, drain the water and allow the containers to cool. Make sure that a vacuum has been created, and store them in the pantry. If you wish to use the preserves fairly soon, you can pour the very hot passata, perhaps leaving it simmer at a very low heat, into the glass containers. Seal the latter and turn them upside down for about 15 minutes, in order to form a vacuum. Make sure that a vacuum has been created. It can be kept for up to 10 days. You can also keep it in

the fridge once the containers have cooled down. I recommend that you involve children when preparing the passata: it will be a wonderful experience!

Catia Mossa, Mola di Bari (Bari)



MOTHER-PROOF PASSATA

I have always made passata this way, like my mother used to. First, wash the well-ripened tomatoes and cut them in half or quarters if they are large. Let them drain for a short while and then place them in a large pot to cook, stirring frequently to prevent them from sticking to the bottom and burning. In the meantime, you can wash the bottles (I usually wash them the day before because I make a large amount) and then put them in the sun to dry and warm up.

By now, the tomatoes should already be cooked, so squeeze them using the tomato press (I have the manual one).

After having done this, put the passata back on the heat and let it cook for slightly longer, just long enough to reduce it a little, making sure that you stir it frequently. Lastly, add the basil leaves that have been washed and dried with a cloth.

Prepare a large container lined with a blanket, which will be used to put the bottled sauce in. It is now time to bottle the sauce, which must be boiling hot.

Pour it into the bottles that have been warmed in the sun, if possible. I have a tool for putting the crown caps on, but you can also use plastic stoppers or screw caps, the important thing is that they create a good seal.

When arranging the bottles of preserves, cover them with a blanket to keep the heat in. When finished, place more blankets on top and leave them there for a couple of days. They will keep warm for four or five days.

Put them in the pantry only after they have cooled down completely. I have some sauce from last year that still tastes like fresh tomato.

I use it by putting a little olive oil in a saucepan in which I fry a

whole clove of garlic (which I remove at the end). I then add the sauce and a pinch of salt. As soon as it starts to boil, the sauce is ready for seasoning the pasta. Buon appetito!

Lina La Russa, Militello in Val di Catania (Catania)



A SAUCE FOR EVERYONE, TOGETHER TO REMEMBER

This is how it started. We set the vegetable garden in motion by planting seeds from the previous year and waited anxiously for the seedlings to grow. I remember that my grandmother took care of everything. Here we are in the Marche region, in the hinterland of Ascoli Piceno. I remember that my grandmother put all her effort into it. The seedlings were tied with broom collected from the fields. It was “scacchiavano” (pruned) in order to provide more light, but be careful not to overdo it! The tomatoes could be cooked by the sun! Then there would be trouble! Once the tomatoes were ready, we picked them, placed them on jute “bales” and left them to ripen for a few more days. In the meantime, we prepared everything we needed. Beer bottles that had been put aside over the years, glass milk bottles, and countless old honey jars, all of which would soon be filled with tomatoes, were washed. New bottle caps and lids were bought and the electric press, built by my uncle, was set up. The party began. And here comes the crucial day. The tomatoes were washed in the large tub and then drained. If we made sauce, they were cut into four and the stalk and “core” removed. They were then squeezed slightly and put straight into the tomato press to separate the pulp from the skins. If we made chopped tomatoes, the tomatoes were boiled, just enough so that they could be “peeled”, split and put into jars. Woe betide you if you were to leave pockets of air...! So with the handle of a wooden “spoon” one tried to fill the gaps with an up and down movement, as if you were stabbing them. A basil leaf and a small sprig of celery were always placed in the middle of the jar, “so it becomes flavoured”, grandmother said. Then we filled the beer bottles with the sauce, sealed the caps using the special tool and

brought them down to the “callare” (bin) that in the meantime my uncle or my father were getting ready to vacuum seal the jars and bottles. The bottles were put in this aluminium bin, covered with a bale of jute and submerged in water. The fire was lit and they were boiled. Once that was done, they would be left until the following day when they would be taken home and crammed into the attic to provide provisions for the year to come. Throughout this “routine” the radio was always on, tuned to the “Lattemiele” radio station; there was always a song that my grandmother hummed along to. Now my grandmother is no longer with us, but the tradition continues. In her place, there is my father, my uncle, my mother and we grandchildren who follow the same “modus operandi”. The only difference is that we no longer hum, but the flavour of the sauce plunges us into the most beautiful memories. Now that I live in Lazio, I also help my mother-in-law who uses more or less the same method while she hums or makes jokes. As they say, Heaven helps happy people! A good sauce to everyone!

Ilaria Mancini, Cittareale (Rieti)





THE GRAZIANI FAMILY'S PASSATA

Abruzzo Version

INGREDIENTS

2 Kg Pera d'Abruzzo tomatoes (Pear Tomatoes from Abruzzo)

2 medium carrots

1 medium leek

2 small chillies also known as "sajettini", basil leaves

Drifting through my teenage memories, here's the recipe for the Graziani family's tomato passata. The freshly picked pear tomatoes were washed and the "stem" removed. The XXL ones were cut into 2/3 pieces. We placed them on a dripping pan or baking tray and put them immediately in the oven to dry. Tradition required them to be placed in a wood oven, because according to the "passata guru", my maternal grandmother, they remain more fleshy and softer, but today I dry them in an electric oven. Next was the most enjoyable part, pressing the tomatoes (together with the peel because of the health benefits of lycopene) in the red wooden "Tric Trac" with a hand crank. It was called a "Tric Trac" because of the unmistakable noise it made... We all longed to turn the hand crank, dressed up in a splendid outfit: an apron down to the ankles and hair tied and tactical cap. The passata was then poured into sterilised bottles using a funnel and stick made especially for the occasion. The bottles were then strategically placed in the maxi-container by my father who supervised, timed and admired them. This recipe recounts one of the happiest days of my summer holidays.

Elisa Graziani, Teramo

THE MEMORY CHEST

Among the traditions that are gradually being lost, there is certainly that of preparing tomato passata at home. This ritual is progressively disappearing because we are now used to making quick meals and buying ready-made, often industrially made, products. My daughters, just like many other young people, have never taken part in this “ritual”, while when I was a child, summer was not summer without homemade passata! Have you ever associated an image or an object with a happy moment in your life? Well, for me, continuing to prepare passata at home means remembering my childhood and reliving the pure and genuine happiness I felt when I prepared it together with my family. The doors of the buildings opened wide and the whole family gathered in the courtyard, each member with a specific task. It was a true party, which started at 6 in the morning (we children could not sleep the night before due to the excitement). The courtyard was filled with voices and “orders”, we sang, we children played until we were assigned the usual task, which was the easiest and least dangerous, of putting the basil leaves and San Marzano tomatoes cut into wedges into the bottles. The women of the family washed, cooked, drained and pressed the Fiascone tomatoes; Aunt Lidia and Aunt Teresa filled the bottles with hot passata and the men sealed them with corks (later replaced by crown caps). I still keep the wooden tool that was used to put the corks in with care and “devotion”. The tool opened into two parts; the cork was placed in the centre and the tool closed again. A small plunger appeared from a hole at the top that was then centred over the bottle and hit with a mallet. My mother, as meticulous as she was, then fastened the cork to the bottle with string, in a cross-shaped fashion with a couple of knots. After a few hours of work, we took a break for breakfast that consisted of a slice of fresh bread with the freshly



prepared passata. I will never forget those flavours and aromas! Immediately afterwards, the wooden fire would be lit under the bins, which had been lined with worn military blankets (my father and my uncle had “fought” in the war in Africa) and the bottles of tomato passata were arranged head to tail in the bins. They were separated by tea towels to protect them from shocks. Lastly, the bins were filled with water, covered with a sort of lid and then left to boil for over an hour. Afterwards, the embers were spread and we started to roast the corncobs, while Aunt Eleonora prepared barley for everyone. In short, preparing passata for the winter was almost like holding a village party because the neighbours often helped one another. Now the party is over, because modern life and modern houses don’t provide “space” for these traditional preparations. My mother continued to prepare them at home with my father as long as she could, but she had to change her method. She put the bottles, still with the hot thick passata in them, covered with blankets in a trunk. Nostalgic and sentimental as I am, I boil them in an aluminium pot on a gas cooker and prepare small amounts, just to carry on the tradition to which I am so attached. Even if the amount I prepare is always less, I make certain I do it with my daughters, who no longer live at home, so that even just by watching, they can one day repeat this tradition in their own homes. Because if the traditions are not handed down, they become lost, and losing the “memory” is an irreversible loss.

Carmela Masi Liveri, Napoli

THE SCENT OF SUMMER

It was summer. Summer began with the radio being hung from the branch of an olive tree at the front of the house. It was the only place where it was possible to pick up Radio Malta, with Jocelyn and his foreign accent who compiled the charts of the best-selling records of the week. Sometimes by divine intercession, it was possible to pick up some local radio stations. Celentano was croaking his summer loves, not due to any fault of his own, but because of the condition of the grey “Geloso” loudspeaker. The smells of summer were everywhere. At our house, summer began with the smell of tomatoes and basil. The whole family used to gather in the countryside to make tomato preserves: “buttighi and u strattu” (bottles and extract). Every year my grandmother would take out the heavy “Tre Spade” tomato press from the same box, as if from a reliquary. She would then sterilise it and put it back together. This was the starting point. Everyone had their own task, which remained the same over the years. Nobody was allowed to abdicate or relinquish their role, except for serious health reasons or premature death. My mother and my aunt washed the tomatoes, my grandfather was in charge of the hand crank, my uncle bottled the tomatoes, my sister and I cleaned the caps, lined up the bottles and handed my grandmother the basil leaves that had already been washed and dried. My father was in charge of the fire, whilst my grandmother was in charge of everything (from the tomato to the pressing) and if everything went according to plan, she and she alone, would fill the bottles with the correct amount of precious liquid and sealed them using the capping machine. The result was always excellent. It was a week of excitement, everyone’s clothes were spattered with tomatoes just like the chatter around the bottles, the laughter at my grandfather’s ironic jokes, my grandmother scolding him,

my mother and aunt chatting and laughing. All my life, the new summer life started like every year, around the wooden boxes full of freshly picked tomatoes. Once the tomato sauce had been made, we prepared the extract, the joy of all of us. To make the extract, the tomatoes had to be more watery and therefore passed through the endless screw or the Tre Spade tomato press very quickly. My mother and aunt had already thoroughly washed and dried the “fagnotta”, the earthenware plates, which were passed down from mother to daughter and that bore signs of age, small cracks, chips and spider web cracks on the enamel. I loved those very heavy colourful plates with, birds, roosters and fish painted on the bottom, all extremely colourful. The older ones were more rustic, a dark yellow colour with blue or green circles around the edge; they belonged to my great-grandmother. The very liquid passata was placed in a large pot and my grandmother stirred it in one direction and then the other, like a kind of propitiatory rite. My father and my uncle had already set up a base to support it on the terrace; the extract had to be high up, as close as possible to the sun and away from dust and earth. Long and thick boards were then placed on the iron trestles and washed thoroughly with running water. Then the procession started that involved all the members of the family with the dishes being distributed according to age and strength and with instructions to hold them carefully. Once they had been arranged on the boards, the men went to fetch the pot containing the vermilion coloured liquid and my grandmother filled the dishes using the large ladle, which was only ever used for that purpose. From that moment on, a long coming and going of the women of the house for “arriminari u strattu” (turning and mixing the extract) would begin. Throughout the day and especially in the hottest hours, you had to go and stir the liquid sauce with a wooden spoon until the scorching sun evaporated all the water, leaving only the tomato concentrate or extract. In the evening, all the dishes were covered with a white

gauze. As it thickened, the sauce became extremely sweet and we just couldn't stop ourselves from occasionally stealing a bit, hoping to cover up the theft by pretending to mix it. My grandmother was worse than a general in combat gear so we were never able to get away with it. However, we did reach a compromise: a plate just for us. While the women of the house protected themselves from the sun with a white handkerchief on their heads, we made our way to the terrace with large slices of bread on which we spread the precious extract, which was better than Nutella. In the end, few of the dishes that initially covered a large part of the terrace remained; as the sauce dried, it was transferred from the small dishes to the large ones, until it reached the right consistency. Then the glass jars were filled, basil leaves were put in them and the contents covered with olive oil. A few spoonfuls of that concentrate would flavour sauces, meat, and various dishes throughout the winter. I was 14 that summer, the first summer without grandfather Vincenzo. I was assigned the task of turning the hand crank... and whilst I was turning it, I realised I was making ironic jokes... my grandmother scolded me lightly, my sister laughed, and my mother as well as my aunt talked about life. All around was the scent of summer, tomato red and basil green.

Maria Carmela Miccichè, Scicli (Ragusa)



TERESA'S STRAPASSATA

Over time, the machine has changed, from a manual one to this electric one, but the old methods have been maintained, handed down from generation to generation, following the typical recipe of the area! Only organic tomatoes, grown in our garden which once “adijuti” (selected) are washed, cut in half, “scaddati pe cinqu minuti” (blanched for five minutes) in boiling water, “sculati ncia na cofhina cu filici e na tuvajja” and then drained in an artisanal wicker or flexible wood basket, using a typical but nowadays little known process used in some of the small villages in our area. In the past, “ferns” were placed at the bottom of the basket as they were “plants” found everywhere in the countryside.

They prevented the tomatoes sticking to the thin tablecloth, so that the water could seep out more easily. “A sarza vena quindi manijata” at this point, the sauce in the basket is turned over repeatedly with a wooden spoon to drain the excess water, which is the main constituent of tomatoes. When the right consistency has been reached, the sauce is transferred to a plastic container and bottled “nce boccacci do juice and fruit”, in fruit juice bottles.

The glass bottles in which we bottle the sauce are still traditionally called fruit juice bottles as they used to be packaged in one-litre bottles. Fresh basil leaves or whole bitter chillies are placed in some bottles to add flavour to the sauce at the time of use. Once the bottles have been tightly closed, they are placed in a “ncia na coddara” (copper pot).

The layers of bottles are separated by tablecloths to prevent them from breaking, and “si gujjia pe na ura” (boiled for an hour) to be sure that an airtight seal is created. Here ends our

traditional “Sarza” (sauce) recipe, with the bottles carefully stored in the pantry, ready to fill the tables in winter and the hearts of the people we give them to!

Valentina Gulli, Chiaravalle Centrale (Catanzaro)



SMART PASSATA

Making passata has always been part of my family's tradition (we are Sicilian).

In the past, it was my paternal grandmother who, assisted by her daughters and daughters-in-law, prepared hundreds of bottles of tomato sauce for the whole family at the house in the countryside.

After the grandparents, it was my father and mother's turn to prepare the tomato sauce for my family and for my brother's family. I still remember them in their garden of the house in Palermo, struggling with the crates of tomatoes that my father used to get from town.

The tomatoes were cooked in large pots with sliced onion, garlic, oil, salt and basil stalks: my mother used to say that the true taste of basil is in the stalks.

Once cooked, the tomatoes were pressed and put back on the heat to be reduced to the right consistency, flavoured with basil leaves, more salt added if necessary and a good pinch of sugar. The sauce was then ready to eat.

It was then bottled while still hot. They placed a pan of boiling water on the fire and put a bottle in it, which they filled with sauce via a funnel.

Once sealed, the bottles were wrapped in woollen blankets and placed in the crates until they cooled down.

When my father and mother became older, the baton was passed on to me: I couldn't give up the pleasure of the tomato sauce that had given me so much joy for many years.

So every summer I take on a very tiring job, because in Rome, where I live, I have neither the countryside nor a garden. I just have an ordinary kitchen where I can process only ten kilos of

tomatoes at a time. The result though is always worth the effort. Unlike what my parents did, I pour the sauce into various sized "Bormioli 4 Seasons" jars that I have sterilised in water.

Up until last year, I used to press the tomatoes by hand using a special steel tomato press. This year my children gave me an electric one, which has made the work easier.

My recipe

Here is the recipe for my tomato sauce, the one we really enjoy. It is also very handy because it is already seasoned and ready for use.

Put 5 kg of washed and cut tomatoes in a pot and squeeze them a little by hand. I add basil stalks and leaves, 2 large sliced onions, 3 cloves of garlic and salt.

Cook for about 40 minutes; 5 minutes before the end I add a spoonful of sugar and extra virgin olive oil.

After having strained the tomato, I judge the consistency of the sauce. If it is dense I don't put it back on the heat, I just finish seasoning it, if necessary.

I put a saucepan with a small amount of water on the heat and put the jars in it. I fill them with sauce via a funnel.

I put a basil leaf in each jar and always seal them with new lids.

When the jars are cool, I wrap them in cotton cloths, place them in large pots and boil them.

In order to sterilise them properly, I wait 50 minutes from when the water starts to boil: I then let them cool down and store them in the pantry.



The tomatoes I use

Every year my sauce is a surprise. For many years, I have used a mixture of Datterino, cherry and Piccadilly tomatoes. I buy them at the local market and rely on my experience to make the right choice.

Last year, I went on holiday to the Abruzzo coast and brought back 60 kilos of locally produced oxheart tomatoes to Rome. The result was a fantastic passata because that particular type of tomato has a very tasty pulp and gives a high yield due to its very thin skin.

This year I had an unexpected and even better experience. On the recommendation of a close Sicilian friend, I met a farmer from Ribera (an area that produces excellent crops) who supplies her with particularly good tomatoes, which he has also agreed to send to me.

He also won me over because of the pride with which he showed me his products, sending me photos of the rows of plants.

I managed to fulfil the dream of my life, to rediscover the flavour of the sauce made with the best tomatoes from my area. The taste of my home town.

An interesting fact: in some Sicilian towns, the tomato is still called by its ancient name “pumu d’amuri” (apple of love); in fact it is red, has a heart shape and, according to some traditions, has aphrodisiac powers.

Gaudia Campisi, Roma

THE TASTE OF A VERY NATURAL TRADITION

Super Smooth Preserve ANTIX di Pomodorino BARONETTO
ROSSO del PARTENIO.

Variety GROWN by me: Cultivar Ultra BIO 7.17, Autoctona Ecotipo
Locale Ancestrale da Serbo N.b.

Before making the above preserve, you should have Baronetto cherry tomato powder available that is obtained by drying the cherry tomatoes naturally in the sun and then grinding them with a mortar and pestle. Baronetto tomatoes, which have been dried naturally and traditionally in the sun, are also required. Once the 2 additional ingredients are available, we can move on to the recipe.

We take a large bunch of Baronetto Rosso cherry tomatoes matured for at least 2-3 months or alternatively ripened under straw for the same amount of time, from the cellar. Wash the tomatoes thoroughly, adding bicarbonate of soda, then dry them. Then blanch the tomatoes for a few minutes in a pot and blend the skins.

After having done this, let them cook for about 20 minutes and then let them stand for a while. After standing, blend the mixture again. Then blanch it a second time and then leave it to stand and cool down. In the meantime, we prepare the jars that have already been washed and sterilised. Once the mixture has cooled, it is strained.

After having done this, it can be bottled. Before placing the nectar in the jars, place 50 grams of dried tomatoes and 5 grams of Baronetto tomato powder at the bottom of the jars. Then pour 150 grams of nectar in to a jar that has a capacity of 212 grams. Once this has been done, tightly close all of them

with a cap and move on to the cooking and vacuum packing stage. Once the jars are ready, place them in a pot and cover with boiling water. Leave them to stand until the water cools down.

Once the water has cooled, boil everything for about 60-70 minutes from when the water starts to boil. The jars should be removed after the water has cooled down. Once removed, the jars should be dried and left for 5 hours with the cap facing downwards. And that's it! Please note that for best results, this variety of tomato must be used when making this type of preserve. In a fresh-seasoned or transformed state, it is allergen, histamine, histidine, tyramine and nickel -free, and has very powerful antioxidant properties.

Vito Napolitano, Sperone (Avellino)



MEMORIES TO PRESERVE

Tomato Sauce

Call it whatever you like, but I grew up calling it tomato sauce. Or perhaps even preserve, but never passata in my house, just sauce or preserve. Before telling you how I make it, I'd like to tell you what I think about when I talk about tomato sauce. When I was a child, up to the age of nine, I lived in a house surrounded by fields. I lived in a house with a vegetable garden at the front. My grandmother Carmela also lived with my parents and me. My aunts, uncles and three cousins lived in the flat above.

My grandmother was born in 1908 and for many years, she was the cook of the family, a very large family of up to seventy people. They were tenant farmers of a noble family. Tenant farming ended in the late 1960s. At that time, many large families split up, each finding a home elsewhere and sometimes also in other areas. When my grandmother left the house, she took some enormous aluminium pots fitted with a hook handle with her. Those pots are still used by my family today to make tomato sauce and other preparations, such as cooked vegetables or the bain-marie for the jars.

The day of the Tomato

When I was a child, the day the sauce was made was planned and prepared in advance. Everything revolved around this event that celebrated the summer. A bit like the day of slaughtering the pig that celebrated the winter.

The tomato sauce was made in August, when tomatoes were plentiful, they grew quickly but most of all there were many pairs of

hands available to help. All the women in the family were involved, from the oldest to the youngest. There was always something to do. Even some of the men were involved to do the hardest jobs.

The first step was to harvest the tomatoes, which started a few days earlier. The tomatoes were of various types, round oxheart tomatoes and pear-shaped ones called "cirio". They were spread out on tables, in what was a sort of garage-kitchen, which later became a tavern for my aunts and uncles. The same room in which the slaughter table was set up. They had to be left there to mature and dry out. They were constantly checked for rot or other defects. The table always had to be covered with a floral oilcloth.

Operation jars

The other thing to do was to wash the bottles and jars in the laundry room. Orangeade bottles were also used, which were then sealed with a crown cap. Jars of all kinds, mostly large, with a screw cap. The ones that had a seal were usually reserved for sweet and sour peppers.

The jars were recycled several times and the old labels scraped off.

Then there was the ritual, which thank God is no longer used, to buy the famous acetylsalicylic acid. It was bought at the chemists and was used as a preservative for the tomato sauce. I still remember the sachets and the smell that made me feel sick. I found out a few years later that I also have an intolerance to it.

My cousins remember that it produced a sort of foam in the bottles and that the sauce at the top was thrown away. Was the dosage wrong perhaps?



It was used because it meant that the passata could be kept even up to a few years in the jar. Fortunately, it was banned.

The day of the Tomato Sauce

Everything is ready and the day of the sauce is here. A word should be said about the clothing. Personally, I think you can cook in a tank top, but my grandmother's flowered housecoat takes the cake. While someone carries the tubs of tomatoes to the fountain, others set up the equipment: A table covered with an oilcloth to which the tomato press was attached. A gas burner to put the pots of tomatoes on, a wooden stick and a "cazza a busi" (skimmer), to collect them. Clean buckets to put the chopped tomatoes in, knives, cutting boards, and off we go.

Ingredients for the tomato sauce: in addition to salt and the sachet from the chemists, there was celery and onions from the vegetable garden. I also remember a part with peppers. No basil, this particular aromatic herb wasn't used in those days. The procedure was as follows: the tomatoes were washed and cut into pieces, removing the stalk and other waste. They were then placed into the large pot with a small amount of celery, onion, boiled for about ten minutes and stirred.

The tomatoes, still hot, were then transferred to the press that made an absurd noise. Someone was given the job of turning the hand crank or hours. After the tomatoes had been through the press once, the waste was passed through it again, as it was still possible to extract some more pulp.

After that, all the sauce was placed in a large pot and cooked until it became "bea fisso" (thick).

Once in the jar or bottle, it was left to cool, and then crammed

into the cellar.

The preserve was used mainly for cooking meat sauce, stewed chicken and duck. It could be used for all the recipes that required tomato until June the following year.

Sensorial memory

What I most like to remember, and which still excites me and makes me smile sweetly, is the joy of the senses. The intense aroma of that hot tomato, which flows down from the nose and almost fills the stomach.

The intense red colour, which you found on light summer clothes, bare feet and arms.

The wonderful taste of raw ripe tomatoes and then tasting the preserve to see if it had the right amount of salt and was thick enough. Lastly, there was the almost imperceptible sound of the simmering passata and the louder “tloctloc” of the press. When I sit at the table in front of a plate of pasta with tomato sauce, if I close my eyes, I can relive this moment.

My Sauce

We all know that the best recipe for tomato sauce is your mother’s one. Every mother has her own technique, her ingredients, her method, and hers is unquestionably the best of all. I must confess that I have bought ready-made passata less than ten times in my entire life.

My mother makes, I don’t know, maybe 300–400 jars that are enough for the entire winter for all her children.

Hers is a pure and simple tomato sauce, with nothing in it except tomatoes, salt and perhaps a little basil. It’s very liquid, but the great thing about it is that you can make it into whatever you want and season it as you like. Here is my recipe for cherry tomato passata:

Ingredients

- very ripe cherry tomatoes
- coarse salt
- basil

I leave the cherry tomatoes in the sun to warm up and dry for half a day.

I wash them, cut them in half and place them in a colander with a handful of coarse salt.

Once they have drained for an hour, I put them in a tall, strictly aluminium, pot. I use an aluminium pot because it heats evenly from the base and up the sides.

This prevents additional steam or water from forming, and allows them to dry out.

I cook the tomatoes while stirring them with a wooden spoon for at least 15–20 minutes.

I pass the still hot tomatoes through a vegetable mill fitted with a fine mesh, adding some basil leaves every now and then while I squeeze it.

If the sauce is already thick enough, I put it in the jars as it is; otherwise, I cook it for another ten minutes.

This sauce is perfect for seasoning pasta. I make jars of different sizes so that when I open a jar I finish it straight away. It is also good to eat with a slice of bread and stracciatella.

And how do you make it?

Buona passata to everyone!

Monica Campaner, San Donà di Piave (Venezia)



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