



**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THE ANCIENT FORMULA OF A NEVER OUTDATED RITUAL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 whist 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)



IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH TO BE HAPPY

I start the process of making my passata (tomato purée) as early as May... with the planting of all the tomato plants. Looking after them and the joy when they begin to turn red. A priceless feeling. I take my two-year-old into the garden and he asks... “Eat?” Referring to the cherry tomatoes... of course darling. This makes me realise that the path I am on is the right one, and seeing him unintentionally grasp these nuances makes all the effort I have put in to get there well worth it. This year I had to opt for a new way of making “passata”. Since I had not been able to make several batches from mid-July until the first week of August after the harvest, I washed every single tomato, dried them and put them in the freezer. When the chosen day arrived, together with my partner and, of course, the little one whom we simply could not leave out (while carefully supervised), all I had to do was tip the still-frozen tomatoes into the pot, close the lid and leave them on the stove for about an hour and a half. We then took them out and drained all the excess water, then the tomatoes were puréed. To my amazement, it produced a very firm and delicate pulp. Admittedly, I lost out on quantity but I have obtained a product of unparalleled quality! A pinch of salt, and before closing the jars the best assistant I could ask for added a leaf of very fresh basil. One hour is needed to create the vacuum with the jars under water... and I now have the aromas from my garden even in the middle of winter! Oh, I almost forgot: nothing goes to waste! The water released by the tomatoes is used it to “soak the bread to make Pan molle” as they say in Tuscany, let me know how it turns out! It doesn't take much to be happy!

Francesco Lioni, Avigliana (Turin)

TOMATO PASSATA: HOMEMADE, IT TASTES COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!

Choose well-ripened tomatoes, discarding those with traces of mould or rot. Remove the stalks and wash the tomatoes in water and baking soda (one level teaspoon of baking soda per litre of water). This process will remove surface dust and any chemicals with which the crops have been treated. Boil some water and put in the previously washed tomatoes. Wait for the skin of the tomatoes to wrinkle until cracks appear (this usually takes a minute or so), then remove them from the pot with the help of a colander or skimmer. Put the tomatoes in the squeezer and extract the passata. If necessary, put the skins that were removed the first time back into the squeezer again, because some pulp may still be extracted from them. Take special care when preparing the jars that the passata will be kept in. The jars must be washed thoroughly and dried. New lids have to be bought every year because although they may appear intact on visual inspection, the seals on the old lids lose elasticity and become flattened by the neck of the jar on which they have been fastened, no longer ensuring an airtight seal. Be careful when choosing lids. Normal lids slide into the thread of the jar thanks to thin tabs obtained by bending the lid in a few places. When a certain amount of force is exerted to tighten the lid onto the jar, there is only pressure on four or five thin tabs which, having little resistance, often deform. At this point, we can feel the lid turning loosely or that it has caved in. Heat a large pot of water.

In the meantime, pour the passata, while still hot, into the jars, taking care to fill to within two centimetres of the rim. This air cushion helps to absorb the pressure that will be created when



the jars are boiled. Close the jars and tighten the lids. Wrap each jar in a sheet of newspaper or old fabric. This helps cushion the small bumps between the jars caused by boiling. Place the jars, which have been wrapped in this way, in the pot of water that will now have become lukewarm, taking care to arrange them as compactly as possible, so that as many as possible fit but also to limit movement during boiling. We put a lid on the pot. At this point, the water temperature will continue to rise gradually until it reaches boiling. The jars must boil for at least an hour to give the inner layers of the passata time to reach the high temperature. Although the passata inside the jars reaches a temperature of 100 degrees, it will not boil because a higher pressure than the atmospheric pressure has been created inside them, and under these conditions the liquid boils at a higher temperature than at atmospheric pressure. Turn off the flame under the pot and wait a few hours so that the temperature of the water and the jars slowly drops. This will prevent the jars from breaking. Dry the jars and, if necessary, press the safety seal by pressing your finger in the middle of the lid so that it remains concave. If after five or six days the lid remains down, it means that no fermentation has taken place and we can store the jars away. If there are swellings or, worse still, traces of mould, throw the jar away. These preserves will keep for several years.

Dora Romano, Casoria (Naples)

A SARSA

This recipe starts with washing the tomatoes, carefully selected one by one and immersing them in water, which must be changed frequently. In the meantime, fill a pot with water and place it on the gas stove or – in the traditional way – over a wood fire. Add the tomatoes to the pot and cook for about 30 minutes. Remove the tomatoes from the pot and drain them in the “cannistra”, a container made of reeds suitable for draining. A tomato squeezer is assembled and then we start squeezing the tomatoes. Before filling the bottles with the passata, one or more basil leaves must be added to each empty bottle. Immediately afterwards, bottle well and finally place the bottles in a pot filled with water and boil for about an hour. The next day, the bottles are taken out of the pot and stored. And the passata or as we say here “A Sarsa” is finished. That’s all from Sicily and the Nebrodi mountains. Regards,

Antonino Natoli, Sant’Angelo di Brolo (Messina)





SOME TRADITIONS NEVER DIE

This is the description of our recipe for home-made tomato bottles. I should point out that in the past we have always made tomato preserves in glass jars, filling them with chopped tomatoes, and that this year, as we had decided to “purée” them, we bought a “tomato squeezer”. Following the advice of our trusted shopkeeper in Messina, we consequently bought a “Tre spade” model. The place where the whole process takes place is my home in the hamlet of Quattropiani di Lipari, specifically in Contrada Serrofico. In the past it was a cause for celebration because our children were also involved but, for work reasons, they were not able to help this year, so it took my husband and I a whole day to complete everything. We usually form an assembly line that still amuses the children, even if they are older, because it is still a time of coming together. The process is the same as it was in my family when I was a child. I still jealously preserve the old “tomato squeezer” we used to use, which is now obsolete. The tomatoes are picked the night before from our plantations. The preparation begins, therefore, the next morning with the cutting of the tomatoes into 4, 6 or 8 pieces, depending on size, taking care to wash them well first. The second step is the cooking, which is done in three stages given the quantity (about 90 kg) and the size of the pot. All the tomatoes are cooked, strictly and ecologically over a wood fire, are then collected in what is called a “tina”. In just a quarter of an hour, gradually pouring in the cooked tomatoes with a small bowl, and thanks to the work of the “Tre spade” machine, it was easy to pass everything through and then you are immediately ready for bottling.

The filling of the bottles by means of the very convenient and easy-to-use “funnel-bowl” is also fast. Finally, we move on to the closing of the bottles, 185 of them, by applying the pressure caps with the special machine. Once this operation is complete, we move on to the sterilisation (second boiling) of the bottles, again over a wood fire, which will be done by filling a single huge metal bin, preparing the bottom with old clothes to prevent them from breaking. The bottles will be individually wrapped with paper, to prevent damage from bumps, and then secured with weights on a rigid shelf and covered with water up to at least 20 cm to prevent them from being left uncovered due to water evaporation. Once the water starts boiling, the cooking should continue for at least another hour. Once the bottles are cooled, they are removed from the water, placed in boxes and stored in a dark place, ready for use. We don't add anything to the tomato! Many people in Lipari, before closing the bottles, add a sprig of basil by pushing it in with a stick. In days gone by, as pressure caps did not exist, bottles were closed with corks and then sealed with string, and to prevent mould from forming, the tomato passata was covered with a little olive oil. In terms of preserves, this year was special because, as we went back to making passata, I started thinking about the old days, remembering the times I spent with my parents and siblings. I hope that our children will continue this tradition. I do not buy preserves in supermarkets, which is much better because we grow our tomatoes naturally, so we know what we are eating because we do not use chemicals or pesticides.

Giuseppina Allegrino, Lipari (Messina)





GRANDMA ANGELA'S RECIPE

Grandma Angela, 87 years old in December, has been picking tomatoes every summer for a lifetime, as soon as they are ripe. We wake up at 5 a.m., everyone ready, the day starts with the “bottles”! Yes, that’s what she calls them! All the tomatoes are washed thoroughly and put to boil in the pot that Grandma Angela calls a “callara”. Burning fire, my uncle has always been in charge of the fire and putting the lids on. Once the water boils, the tomatoes are scooped out with a special metal tool and put to drain rigorously in a wicker basket. When I was little, I wasn’t even allowed near the pot and the machine used to purée the tomatoes, but for the past 3 or 4 years, Grandma Angela has allowed me near the machine (I am 32 years old... it’s been a long wait!). The tomatoes need to be drained enough, but not completely, so that the passata is thick enough. On one side goes the passata, on the other the skin. Grandma Angela only lets us pass the skin of the tomatoes through the machine once. Then the seasoning, two or three handfuls of salt, taste and stir. We then move on to filling the bottles (strictly beer bottles, kindly provided by the village bar and previously washed and disinfected), with the magic cone! The sauce goes down into the bottle, it must not be filled to the top, so that it does not burst while cooking as Angela says, and then the lids are fastened on. Finally, in a nice big keg, you put all the bottles and boil them for hours... No secrets, just simplicity. Grandma Angela taught me that if you make the bottles at home, you can rest assured all winter long! Enjoy the sauce!

Claudia Canale, Cassino (Frosinone)

SALSA DAY!

I still remember as a child making sauce, it was a way of bringing the family together. My dad and uncles used to plant tomatoes, various types... (the pizzuto, the datterino, the insalatato, etc.) then around mid-August they would harvest them, normally about 10 quintals of tomatoes were produced from each harvest... A few days before the big event - which we nicknamed Salsa day - my mother and my aunts would prepare the necessities. We would start by cleaning the jars and the lids. Then all the equipment that had been stored the year before had to be prepared (tomato squeezers, pots, bowls, ladles, baskets, buckets, gas canister, burner). On the day of the preparation of the sauce, we would wake up at 4 a.m., have a quick breakfast and begin: first we would remove the green stalk from each tomato, look at them one by one, separate the good from the bad, the bad ones would be thrown away, the salvageable ones would pass through the hands of the grandmother who, with a watchful eye, would chop the good ones. The crates of good tomatoes were directly tipped into large tubs filled with water, washed thoroughly and then thrown into a large cauldron placed over the burner, connected to the gas canister, already carefully prepared by my dad. The tomatoes in the cauldron were seasoned with basil and onion (I still remember the smell) and left to cook for about an hour. They were then drained of their water in large perforated baskets, and transferred to the tomato squeezer (more commonly known as the “macchinetta”). The passata was transferred back into the large pot, seasoned with salt and then the jars were filled with the help of a funnel and ladle. Finally, the jars had to be vacuum-sealed, a very careful procedure: each jar had to be wrapped with tea towels so that

they did not touch each other, placed in the cauldron, covered with water and boiled for an hour. This practice is called bain-marie and allows the sauce to be preserved for years. Today, I make a smaller amount of passata, but I still use the hand-cranked machine that my dear grandmother left me.

Michela Pacifico, Lucera (Foggia)





THE STUDENT'S SAUCE

Sun, sea and tomato sauce. This is summer for me! And when, a year ago, I was forced to stay in Pavia due to an injury, I was overwhelmed with memories and nostalgia of when I was a child and helped my family make preserves. So, chatting with some friends from university, I said: "Why don't we make the student's sauce?" At first it seemed like something out of the blue, but then, like the best improvisations, we breathed new life into the oldest of traditions. It has become a regular fixture. At the end of August, when we're returning from holiday, we want to continue enjoying the summer until the last moment and, above all, we need one more excuse not to prepare for the university exams we still have to take. The recipe is very simple: you need tomatoes, usually cheaper ones, but in more fortunate and well-organised situations, you can use those from your grandfather's or some friend's uncle's garden. The basic process of cooking and pressing the tomatoes is the same but undergoes some modifications each year according to regional customs and the childhood memories of all those involved. It is essential that there is at least one person (usually the boyfriend of a best friend, who is forced to participate out of love) who is only there to eat and who is in charge of the entertainment, motivating the team with music, anecdotes, food and something to drink... often, this person also later sets the table for lunch. Entertainment plays a key role in the preparation of the sauce, because the balance between the sweetness and acidity of the tomato will be more or less maintained depending on the mood of each participant. Therefore, in order to obtain a good student's sauce, it is important that everyone is in a good mood and that they are having fun during the preparation. For bottling, empty

jars are used, accumulated at home thanks to the famous “pacco da giù” (food package sent north from relatives in the south), washed with plenty of soap and sterilised, to ensure that the original taste of the student’s passata is not affected. The tomato passata is poured while still hot and the jars are sealed by the strongest person in the group and wrapped with tea towels before being placed in large pots filled with water. It is necessary to let the jars simmer for about thirty minutes and then let them cool in water. Once cooled and dried, the jars are distributed equally to each of the participants (the entertainer will share the spoils with his girlfriend). It is essential to remember to keep a jar of the student’s passata to one side before the cooking phase and to use it immediately to create a fantastic pasta dish that, ideally, will be enjoyed at around 4 o’clock in the afternoon, at the end of the day’s work.

Simone Carbone, Pavia

LIKE THE FIRST TIME

“Good morning darling! Get up, so we can go to grandma’s and make sauce!”. This sentence echoes in my mind, every time I breathe in the scent of my tomato passata boiling in the pot. A tender and vivid memory of when I was a little girl and my mother used to wake me up to go to my grandmother’s house in the countryside to make tomato preserves. I was seven years old the first time and that warm Sunday in late August will remain one of the most beautiful experiences of my life. At the time it was just a game, made up of colours, sounds and smells... I was not yet aware that I would carry on this custom, learning how to prepare tomato passata according to Grandma Teresa’s old recipe. As per tradition, the first phase is the “dressing up” phase, the outfit in other words. It is essential to wear comfortable clothes that can get dirty and ruined if necessary. I remember that as soon as we arrived in the country, Mum would tell us to get changed. We wore old clothes, aprons and tea towels that Grandma had wisely put aside for all of us. My sisters and I were so excited and couldn’t wait to get to work with the rest of the family. Grandma was already ready and had been working for days. She had carefully picked tomatoes from her garden, selecting those most suitable for the peeled tomato preserve and those for the passata. After this division, the family was also divided into two teams and I already knew where to go: between my aunt who filled the bottles with boiling sauce and my uncle who sealed them with metal crown caps, better known to us as tortorelle. But let us go step by step. To prepare the passata, tomatoes need to be cut into medium-sized pieces and cooked in a pot, the size of which varies depending on the quantity of jars to be filled. The



tomatoes must be allowed to soften over a low heat for at least half an hour, stirring them from time to time.

Grandma Teresa was always adamant about this stage of preparation. She carefully and attentively watched over the cooking of her tomatoes and knew exactly when they were ready for pressing. We would make sauce for the whole family and despite being tired, she was always precise so that everything would go well. I remember how I would be enchanted watching her at work, sometimes she would smile at me and the silence would be broken by the bubbling of the sauce in the pot. While waiting for the tomatoes to be cooked, you can proceed with the preparation of the jars and bottles to be filled. They must be empty and already washed, then they are placed in rows on the table and a basil leaf is placed inside. Basil is optional, but my grandmother taught me never to do without it, because its scent enriches the intense flavour of the tomatoes while maintaining their authenticity. When the tomatoes are softened, you can proceed with the preparation of the sauce. After salting them, a little at a time, the tomatoes are placed inside a tomato squeezer and you then carefully start filling the available jars or bottles.

For me, this phase was the most fascinating. The bright red of a tradition handed down from generation to generation that turns the past into something magical and precious, to be jealously guarded and shared, at the right time, with the people you love.

When cooking jars and bottles, it is essential to take great care, wrapping the containers in a cloth before placing them in a large pot of water for at at least 30 minutes. Because of the large production, Grandma Teresa used her old, empty, sheet metal feed containers for the chicks, placed gently over the fire.

This ancient method of boiling required several hours of waiting,

so we would all gather around the fire and over the embers Uncle would roast some corn cobs, to be enjoyed between chats, at the end of a long day's work. This beautiful memory has motivated me to carry on this tradition, also involving my children and grandchildren in the preparation of tomato passata. For me, every time is like the first time.

Carmina Treviso, Potenza





THE TRUE STORY OF...DA' NORMA (THE TRUE STORY OF PASTA ALLA NORMA)

When you say “Norma” you think of Catania and when you talk about Catania you can’t help but speak of “da’ Norma”! Yes, of course, Vincenzo Bellini’s “master” opera, but today I want to tell you about another masterpiece, of Catania cuisine: “a Pasta a la Norma”! Of course, the secret is all in the sauce: a very good tomato passata that dominates a nice plate of spaghetti or rigatoni.

But let’s start at the beginning.

To describe the tomato passata used and the preparation of the dish, one has to “go back” in time, stopping at the end of the summer of 1920 and enter the Pandolfini house, located on Via Etnea in Catania.

Jano Pandolfini, married to Mrs. Rosaria D’Urso and nephew of the already famous theatre and film actor Angelo Musco, invited his uncle and other personalities from the world of theatre and cinema to lunch. It was a sort of an end-of-summer event, and in any case any excuse was perfect for organising a friendly get-together.

Angelo Musco, brought another guest, a man of culture and a dear friend: Nino Martoglio. In addition to being a good poet and playwright, he had already written two plays for him that were later adapted for the big screen. As these lunches were quite frequent, Mrs D’Urso was often embarrassed about the choice of menu, not least because the first great war had only been over for two years and the economy was still struggling to take off.

However, making do with what she had at home, she prepared a dish of pasta with a tomato passata she had prepared

in abundance the day before, fried Turkish aubergines, a sprinkling of salted ricotta and some basil leaves. Simple ingredients, but with a few tricks that elevated it to “gourmet” status, one would say today. The diners complimented Mrs Rosaria, and Nino Martoglio, being the witty and accomplished poet that he was, exclaimed: “Signura Saridda (short form of Rosaria), chista è ‘na vera Norma”, that is, “Mrs Rosaria, this is the real Norma!”. Yes, because in Catania they compared to Norma, Vincenzo Bellini’s most famous opera, everything that was considered the best, the tastiest and the most beautiful, including female beauty!

Having said this about the origins of this dish, let’s move on to the description of it and, above all, the making of the tomato passata and its storage. I learnt these secrets from a great cook from Catania, now deceased, a certain Pino Correnti, who had a restaurant in a theatre hall, where the exploits of the Paladins of France were performed during dinner with the famous Sicilian puppets.

The key ingredient is undoubtedly the tomato. Not just any variety, also because at that time few were known and above all there were no hybrid varieties, but the “rizzo catanese” ribbed tomato, which is large, has little water and an incomparable red-purple colour.

For me, having an agronomist in the family, it was not very difficult to procure this variety of tomatoes. After boiling them briefly, I would squeeze them with our sturdy electric tomato squeezer and, before jarring and sterilising them, I treated them so that they could be stored ready for the whole winter, and so that I could prepare some “Pasta alla Norma” dishes, with the taste and smell of products ripened in the hot Sicilian sun and not tomatoes from greenhouses and hybrid varieties that can be found in winter.

I continued cooking the passata, adding basil stalks and a few cloves of garlic to give it that real summer aroma. In a pan I fried some Turkish aubergine cubes (cubed because we had to put them in jars, otherwise we would have fried them in slices) and kept the frying oil; “Monte Etna DOP” extra virgin olive oil of course. This is because going back to that late summer day in 1920 and the economic straits then in place, Mrs Saridda certainly would have seasoned the tomato passata with the oil flavoured by frying the aubergines. Whoever wants to is invited to give it a try, and you will see the difference!

However, I had set myself the task of preparing an “almost ready-made” Norma-style sauce, so excluding the salted ricotta (to be sprinkled on the seasoned pasta at the end), which can be bought in summer and, by vacuum-packing it, be kept in excellent condition even in winter, I also filled the jars with abundant leaves of fragrant basil, chopped with a ceramic-bladed knife to avoid blackening them and the frying oil.

I think that during the harsh winter, opening a jar of this preserve to heat up, as soon as the contents touch the bottom of the hot pan, the kitchen will be filled with the scents and aromas that will take us back to a sunny Sicilian summer day. I can assure you: it will be worth it.

I forgot to mention something: Nino Martoglio was a fellow citizen of mine, born in Belpasso, in the province of Catania, like me!

Luciano Signorello, Catania

SMELL OF GOODNESS

Tomato passata is definitely a really easy thing to make, but of course you have to add your own touch! For excellent results, with a delicate, balanced flavour and bright colour, I always choose three different types of tomatoes, wash them well, put them all in a large, fairly high pot, add salt, basil leaves, onion and a bay leaf. I cover with a lid and bring to the boil over a high flame. I remove the lid, stir, lower the flame and leave to cook until all the tomatoes soften. At this point, I turn off the flame and with the help of a strainer, extract my sauce. I turn until everything has been extracted. No sugar, no oil. It's ready! At this point I just have to decide whether to put my passata in bottles and then sterilise them in the oven, or whether to opt for food bags and store the passata in the freezer. If, on the other hand, I fancy a nice first course with fresh sauce, I sauté a clove of garlic with a splash of oil, add my passata, cook for a few minutes, switch off and finish by adding mint and pepper. Enjoy!

Sabrina Spinuzza, Salerno



THE TASTE OF HOME

Every summer, to make tomato passata for my family, I have to put up with a somewhat tiring (but very pleasant) job as I live in the city and do not have access to the countryside or a garden, but just a normal kitchen where I manage to process ten kilos of tomatoes a day. Nevertheless, I keep up this important habit, in fact I now consider it a tradition, because my passata recipe is really convenient for the family as it is already seasoned and therefore ready to use. Very good pasta dishes can therefore be made quickly, which is particularly useful for those who work and don't have much free time. When making this passata, I use the recipe that was handed down to me by my parents, who in turn learned it from their grandparents who lived in a village in an area of Sicily that has an abundance of tomatoes. So it is a tried and tested recipe from the use that many generations have made of it. Put 5 kg of washed and cut tomatoes in a pot and squeeze them a little by hand. 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 add at least 3 spoonfuls of sugar and extra virgin olive oil. I strain the tomato and assess the consistency of the resulting sauce. If the sauce is not very thick, I reduce it until I obtain the desired thickness. I also check the flavour and decide whether to season further by adding basil and possibly more salt or oil. I put the skins to one side. I let it cool down. I pour the sauce into Bormioli jars. I seal the lids tightly (I always use new lids) and proceed with the sterilisation. After wrapping the jars in cotton cloths, I place them in very large pots and cover them with cold water. It is important that the jars are covered with water. After bringing it to the boil, I leave for 50 minutes. I let them cool in the same pot and finally

store them in the pantry. The skins that I set aside I let dry in the sun, and then blend them to make a powder that I can use on risottos or to coat fresh cheese balls to serve as snacks. Every year my sauce has a different flavour depending on the tomatoes I use. I let my experience guide me. For many years I used a mixture of datterino, cherry and piccadilly tomatoes. Last year, during a holiday in Abruzzo, I brought home 60 kilos of oxheart tomatoes that were perfectly ripe: I got a fabulous passata because this type of tomato has a very tasty pulp and because it has a thin skin it also gives a very high yield. This year I had a wonderful experience: on the recommendation of a dear Sicilian friend, I got in touch with a farmer who supplies her with delicious tomatoes that she kindly sent to me as well, thus realising my life's dream: to rediscover the taste of passata made with tomatoes from my region. The taste of home.

Gaudia Campisi, Rome



TOMATOES, GREEN CHILLIES AND BASIL

Ripe tomatoes are picked, washed and boiled. They are drained and passed through the “Tre Spade” tomato squeezer twice, together with the green chillies and basil, resulting in a pulpy passata. The passata is then mixed and bottled in narrow-necked bottles with pressure caps, using tools handed down through generations. The bottles are then slow-boiled to ensure they can be preserved for a long time.

Emanuele Amante, Carnate (Monza)



THE SCENT OF SUMMER IN SICILY

August is the month for the preparation of tomato preserves, and religiously every year, the ritual is repeated with the whole family. I have taken some inspiration from my mother's recipe, but my tomato sauce is prepared with a few variations.

I remember my mother would be very busy for a few days before getting everything she needed for the preparation of the tomato sauce ready. Out of the garage came the hand-cranked tomato squeezer, the capping machine, the crown caps, the pots, the gas cooker and glass bottles of all sizes.

Finally, the day on which we would make the sauce arrived. It was me, my mother and my brother. All the work took place on the roof terrace from which I could see the rooftops of the houses and the beautiful countryside with its rolling hills.

It started with washing the tomatoes in large plastic tubs, then they were cut in two and salted, as soon as they were softened they were put through the hand-cranked tomato squeezer. Every now and then I would scoop up the juice with the ladle and drink it, it was the best summer juice I had ever had. Everything was bottled with basil leaves and closed. The bottles were placed in a large pot divided by tea towels, and the pot filled with cold water that was brought to a boil, after 40 minutes it was turned off and left to cool.

Today, as then, the know-how is the same as in the past and so is the genuine flavour of the tomato, but this tomato sauce has an extra ingredient, the flavour of shared work and the joy of the moment spent together.

I make a rustic tomato sauce, which involves two ways of preparing the tomato.

I prepare two crates of tomatoes of 20 kg each. I sterilise glass

jars of various sizes ranging from 300 ml to 1 litre by placing them in a large saucepan filled with cold water and boil them for 20 minutes, once cold I remove them and allow them to dry. In the meantime, I wash the tomatoes, cut the first 20 kg in half, sprinkle them with salt and leave them to soften, then squeeze them and put them through the electric tomato squeezer to obtain a very fine tomato passata.

The other 20 kg of tomatoes I blanch whole for a few minutes, remove the skin, cut them to remove the seeds, and put them in a large pot to cook for 10 minutes and then blend them with an immersion blender. The tomato sauce must have a gritty consistency. Then I combine the fine pulp with the chopped pulp and boil for 30 minutes, which runs from the moment it starts boiling. Before putting the sauce into the jars, 5 minutes before turning off the cooker, I put plenty of previously washed and dried basil into the pot and season with salt.

I place the jars in a large pot, lying down, and fill it with cold water, taking care to cover them completely with water. I boil them for 20 minutes, then turn off the cooker and leave them until the water cools down.

Even months later when I open the jar, the sauce smells and tastes like a freshly made summer tomato sauce.

Rosellina Laurianti, Caltagirone (Catania)



TEZZE 33 TOMATO PRESERVE

From father to son, from grandparents to grandchildren, the recipe for Tezze 33 tomato preserve stems from a love of family tradition. Tezze 33, in fact, is the house number where Angela and Giovanni have lived since the 1960s and where, still today after a lifetime working as farmers, they grow the tomatoes in their garden, which are used to make the preserve. These and just a few other ingredients are enough to give life to a product shared by at least four families (in addition to Angelina and Giovanni's, also that of their three children Maria Teresa, Luciano and Valeriano) and whose recipe has now been passed on to the third generation, represented by seven male grandchildren who are constantly, passionately and convivially engaged in the production and creation of the preserve. There are two variations of tomato preserve. The first, the classic version made with San Marzano tomatoes. The second, which is more innovative, aims to rediscover the cultivation of the Nasone tomato, an ecotype native to the Veneto region. In both cases, the plants are grown in the home garden in Lupia (hamlet of Sandrigo, VI) following the rules of organic farming as closely as possible. In addition to tomatoes, a few other ingredients, all grown in the garden, are added: onion, shallot, celery, sage, rosemary and basil, to which a pinch of salt and sugar are added during cooking to offset the tomato's acidity. Once the tomatoes have been picked from the plant, the processing method involves two days of resting and ripening the tomatoes on a wooden pallet in a dry, shady place. After that, the tomato is washed and cleaned, the inner seeds and the watery part of the pulp are removed. The third step involves boiling the tomatoes in their own juice for about an hour. At this

stage, the other ingredients and herbs are added. From time to time, the cooking liquid is drained from the mixture until there is a consistent presence of pulp. Once cooked, the tomatoes are pressed to obtain the finished product. To complete the process, the preserve is poured into sterilised 500- or 300-gram jars (with just a trickle of oil to cover the space between the preserve and the lid), which are then placed in a large aluminium pot, covered with water and boiled again to create the vacuum effect needed for preserving the product. Boiling also allows an additional level of sterilisation of the jar. Once opened, the tomato preserve is bright red in colour and has a gritty texture both to the eye and to the palate. The idea is to make a basic product that can be further thickened or loosened up according to the dish to be cooked.

Nicola Grolla, Vicenza



MOTHER TERESA'S "SARZA"

This year, instead of taking lots of photos, we tried to present our "family" recipe with a simple little video. Tomato passata, or as we call it here "A Sarza", is a serious business, a set of processes made with care and attention handed down from generation to generation. To describe the recipe, I will break it down into a few important steps. 1) "A Raccolta" (The Harvest): The tomatoes are picked and chosen one by one, because only the reddest, most beautiful and ripest ones are sure to give the sauce its characteristic red colour and delicate yet strong flavour. 2) "Tajjati e scaddati" (Chopped and blanched): Once the tomatoes have been washed, they are opened and the stalk removed. They are then blanched for 5/10 minutes and left to drain in a basket lined with a thin cloth so that the water can filter out. 3) "Macinati e sculati" (Ground and drained): Once the water has been drained from the tomatoes, we move on to the grinding process. As the tomatoes are being ground, the sauce is "dropped" into a special "ruvaci", which in our dialect is a large plastic container used specifically for making preserves and anything else edible. The "skins" that come out on the other side of the machine are put through again, and it is here that the redder, thicker part of the tomato can be found. Once this is completed, the sauce is put back into the basket with another cloth and is stirred for a couple of minutes, just long enough to remove the excess water and is put "ncio ruvaci" again. 4) "Nce boccacci e gujjuta" (Into glass bottles and boiled): Once the sauce is ready, it is bottled in classic glass bottles, capped and alternating a layer of bottles with a layer of cloths, placed in a large copper pot and boiled on the stove

for an hour to make sure they are hermetically sealed. Here, in a nutshell, is the recipe for our "Sarza" from Mother Teresa, who loves traditions and even more loves passing them on to someone else.

Valentina Gulli, Chiaravalle Centrale (Catanzaro)



SEA AND PUMMAROLA

In the summer, under the scorching sun, mum lovingly prepares pummarola (tomato sauce). She carefully chooses a kilo of the ripest tomatoes at the village market.

The warm south-westerly gusts of wind carry the scent of basil in the air from the stall next to the fruit and vegetable counter. She is guided by the smell and when she reaches the little plants she takes the one with the greenest and most healthy leaves. Finally, Mum buys a red onion, exclusively Tropea onions, and everything is ready for her super passata.

Purchasing the best ingredients is the secret behind the excellent results, along with the extreme simplicity of the process. In a steel pot, mum pours a generous spoonful of olive oil, bought the year before at her trusted local oil mill.

It is the product from the second pressing, which is sweeter and softer on the palate than that pressed in mid-October, which leaves in the mouth, at least for the first month, that slight tingle typical of autumn. Returning to our passata, mum chops up half an onion and puts it in the saucepan, then washes the tomatoes, roughly chops them into pieces, adds a few basil leaves and cooks everything for a few minutes, no more than five.

From the window you can see the island of Capraia, asleep like a graceful woman on the surface of the sea, shimmering with silver as the freshly cooked mixture is poured into the masher and left there for a morning, draining excess water over a soup bowl which is empty like our bellies.

When the sail boats return to port, in the middle of the day, it is time to throw away the water drained from the tomatoes and purée the now dry pulp.

A thick, red sauce is slowly deposited into the soup bowl and when it is finished, it is garnished with a final splash of oil and a tuft of basil.

The pummarola is ready and the family, smelling its unmistakable aroma, eagerly awaits the time to enjoy it with spaghetti al dente in front of the gulf that frames our summer lunches.

Barbara Carraresi, Florence





50% PICCADILLY, 50% DATTERINI 100% TOMATO PASSATA

My favourite tomato passata recipe has the following ingredients and steps:

- 50% Piccadilly tomatoes;
- 50% Datterini tomatoes;
- Tropea red onion;
- Basil.

Preparation:

After sterilising and drying the jars, I go to my vegetable garden and pick and then wash the tomatoes. The tomatoes are cut in half and placed in a large pot on the stove until they come to the boil. They are cooked for about fifteen minutes, then drained of excess water and mashed. Put the passata back on the heat to reduce it for another 15 minutes or so; if it is still too watery, extend the cooking time until the desired consistency is achieved. In each small jar I put a basil leaf where the boiling sauce is poured. To finish, I close the jars and boil them in water for 30 minutes and let them cool directly in the pot. Once the jars have cooled down, I make sure they are correctly vacuum-sealed. The passata is ready!

Francesca Pontecorvi, Velletri (Rome)

PATTI-STYLE BOTTLES OF TOMATOES

Preparation for the day of making tomato preserves for winter begins the day before with the arrival of the mixed tomatoes: riccio, tubetto and piccadilly. To these basics, a box of white onions and a box of fresh basil are added. In the afternoon, the stalk is removed from the tomato. Armed with gloves, so as not to get their nails dirty, everyone takes part in the stalk removal operation. Children are also encouraged to do their part, as long as they are old enough and won't break the skin of the tomato when removing the stalk: the fruit would turn sour the next day! Finally it is the big day, everything is ready for the preparation of the actual sauce. Early in the morning, at 7 a.m., the two burners with their copper pots are set up. A third burner is ready for the second stage, when the now puréed sauce is reduced before bottling. After washing the tomatoes and roughly chopping them, remove any rotten parts, peel the onions and cut them into small slices. The basil should also be washed carefully but then left to drain. Only the leaves will be used. In large copper pots add the chopped tomatoes, onion and basil in the right quantities according to intuition mixed with experience handed down through the centuries. Once brought to the boil, care must be taken not to let it stick to the bottom. That is why this is a task usually reserved for the strongest members of the brigade: usually women over 60 and boys under 30. Making sauce is not a gala lunch for the Patti family. Halfway through cooking it is time to add salt. In the meantime, the bottles stored during the winter and washed are left in the sun to keep them nice and warm. At a long table, you set up the tomato squeezer, which is so old that it is a miracle it still works, and the cooked tomatoes

are passed through. When are they cooked? When the onion is transparent, is what we say to the little ones. Once the tomato has been puréed, it is placed back on the heat in the aluminium pot. As soon as it "spacca u vogghio", i.e. bubbles, it is reduced a little more and bottled. Bottling is perhaps the most delicate part. No air must be allowed to pass through, and there is an art behind the application of the caps with a sharp blow from the machine. As soon as they are bottled, hoping that none will explode because they are too hot, the bottles are immediately wrapped in sheets of newspaper. So begins the long sleep of the sauce bottles. They will only wake up with the sound of bottle openers, when someone in the family is in the mood for a plate of sauce in the winter.

Francesco Buscemi, Palermo



GRANDPARENTS AND TOMATO PASSATA: THE PERFECT COMBINATION!

Tomato passata has always been a moment of sharing, family reunions, a real ritual that accompanies the hot days of late summer.

A recipe handed down from generation to generation, where the secret to success is always the same: love for what you do and with whom you do it. Yesterday I was a lucky child because I shared this experience with my grandparents, today I am a lucky mum because my little girl has shared this experience with her grandparents.

Grandma Marcella and Grandpa Saro have enhanced the recipe with their culinary experience and expertise. After buying the crates of tomatoes and letting them ripen for a few days, they are washed.

They are then brought to a boil in the big pot with their pleasant smell wafting through the air. Then, we move on to the actual “passata”, which, thanks to modern technology, saves today’s grandparents from the strain and effort. The skins are removed and sauce goes into a super-tank, then forced through the funnels... sauce in the big bottles, for the big ones in the family, and sauce in the small bottles, for the little ones in the family!

Last but not least, we close the bottles tightly with the caps and sterilise them inside our super pot. Success guaranteed... Oh, I forgot to mention... on tomato passata day, you must stay at your grandparents’ house and enjoy the freshly made tomato passata!

Emily Contarino, Mascali (Catania)



THE KING OF THE GARDEN

My recipe for tomato passata is nothing more than squeezing out the very essence of the tomato in its purest state. The king of the garden.

So red and sparkling, it dazzles you as soon as you approach. Meticulously tended from when it was just a tiny seedling, or even a single, simple seed.

From which you remove the buds, to make it grow strong and lush, and which leaves that typical, intense and intoxicating perfume under your nails.

Not to mention the smell in the house when you bring in your rich baskets and get ready for the final step: making the sauce.

Sweet delight, which even in December, when you open the jar, warms your heart and brings you back to the warmth of summer. Picking tomatoes is a joy in itself, a satisfaction that is difficult and almost embarrassing to describe.

Because it is there, in that “tac” when the fruit comes off the plant that you experience such a satisfying feeling, the true fruit of your labour, of the hours spent in the sun cleaning plants and removing weeds, checking leaves and warding off unpleasant insects.

But still, isn't it just as exciting to squeeze out these great little gems and treasure them to taste a little at a time throughout the year?

Well, with a simple but meticulous procedure, this is possible even for the most inexperienced among us, for those who do not have traditions behind them inherited from southern ancestors. Here too, in the heart of the Alps, just a few kilometres from Switzerland, large quantities of tomatoes can be produced and processed into large quantities of sauce.

If this is facilitated by a valuable ally like my Tre Spade machine (this one inherited from my in-laws!) all the better! The processing and cleaning process becomes even easier and more fun.

Tiziana Brusadelli, Chiavenna (Sondrio)





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