

**Day One:** Focuses on making small batches of tomato puree and tomato water, and making crepes for manicotti shells

**Day Two:** Centers on using tomato puree to make marinara sauce, making the cheese filling for manicotti stuffing, and assembling the prepared dish.

**Day One:**

**Tomato Types and Selection**

Tomatoes come in hundreds of varieties, but two common types are ideal for cooking into sauce – plum tomatoes and slicing tomatoes. Plum (aka paste, Roma or San Marzano) tomatoes are smaller, denser, and less juicy. Slicing (aka heirlooms, beefsteak or field) tomatoes are bigger and sweeter with more juice. These two types of tomatoes can be cooked separately or blended together to make a tasty sauce. Cherry tomatoes, while great for pasta salads and stir fries, tend to be too seedy for sauces.

Tomatoes are sold by the pound, box, peck, or bushel, with peak local season from mid-August through September. Local vendors typically offer both newly picked tomatoes and seconded/canning (either slightly bruised or aging) tomatoes. Seconded tomatoes are cheaper, but often bruised or split and more perishable, so inspect before purchasing. Avoid tomatoes with large blemishes or dark spots, large cracks, and foul odors. Use/cook these tomatoes promptly after purchasing.

**Ingredients and Equipment**

Start with at least 3 to 5 pounds of fresh, ripe local tomatoes, a ½ to full cup of basil leaves, and salt.

Food mill, several large pots, large bowls, and sturdy plastic containers.

**Tomato Preparation and Cooking**

Before cooking, place tomatoes in a colander and rinse off any dirt or film on skin. Inspect again for soft spots or signs of spoilage. Core out the center stem with a paring knife. Cut tomatoes in half or quarters and discard any rot or decay. Working in batches, place tomatoes in 3 Qt. pot or 5 Qt. Dutch Oven pot. Salt tomatoes lightly. Hand squeeze several of the riper tomatoes to create a layer of liquid at base of pot. Place lid on pot. Set burner at low to medium heat, e.g., 4 on a scale of 10, to slowly draw liquid out of tomatoes. Once mixture starts to steam and bubble, raise heat slightly to accelerate cooking if desired. Simmer for 30 to 45 minutes until noticeable separation is visible between tomato liquid and pulp. Remove from heat.

## **Making Tomato Water**

Clean and rinse fresh basil, pull off and break up leaves, and place them in a large bowl. Using a ladle, scoop out the hot tomato liquid and place in bowl. Basil will wilt quickly. Try to remove most, but not necessarily all, of the liquid. Let liquid cool to near or at room temperature. Place liquid in plastic containers, refrigerate, then either use in the next 5 to 7 days or freeze in containers. Tomato water tastes similar to canned tomato juice, but has a clear, thin texture. It can be used as a broth in tomato-based soups, such as minestrone, red lentil, tortellini en brodo and gazpacho, or in side dishes like Spanish rice.

## **Making Tomato Puree**

The cooked tomato pulp is easily transformed into tomato puree. Assemble and place a 2 Qt. food mill over a 3 Qt. pot. Larger food mills may require larger pots. Spoon or pour small amounts of the cooked tomatoes into the mill. Slowly turn the mill handle clockwise to crush tomatoes, forcing the puree into the bottom of the pot and keeping the tomato skins and seeds inside the mill. If the mill handle is difficult to turn, remove some of the tomatoes from the mill and/or turn the handle counterclockwise. As tomato skins and seeds accumulate in the mill, remove them, and add more cooked tomatoes.

Once out of tomatoes, place puree in a clean pot, simmer, and cover at low to medium heat, bring to light boil, add fresh, chopped basil, cook 5 to 10 minutes, remove from heat and cool. Store puree in plastic containers for 5 to 7 days or freeze for 3 to 6 months. It can be used to make marinara (see below) and other sauces or added to many other dishes. Homemade tomato sauce stands out for its bright red color and mild, less acidic taste.

## **Day Two: Marinara Sauce**

### **Ingredients**

- 2 to 3 cups homemade tomato puree with basil
- Olive Oil
- ¼ cup diced onion
- salt and pepper
- clove of garlic

### **Directions**

1. Heat oil in a large saucepan.
2. Sauté onion in oil over medium heat for several minutes until transparent, but not brown.
3. Add tomato puree, simmer, and cover for 5 to 10 minutes.
4. Add salt and pepper to taste.
5. Remove from heat and set aside.

## **Manicotti Filling**

### **Ingredients**

- 2 pounds ricotta cheese
- 4 ounces mozzarella, shredded or diced
- ½ cup Romano cheese
- 1 egg
- 2-3 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
- pinch of salt
- pinch of pepper

### **Directions:**

1. Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl until well combined.
2. Filling can be made a day in advance and refrigerated.

## **Fill and Bake Manicotti**

### **Ingredients**

- Marinara Sauce
- Manicotti Crepes
- Manicotti Filling
- Romano or Parmesan cheese, grated

### **Directions**

1. Heat oven to 350°F degrees.
2. Spoon and spread a thin layer of marinara sauce into a 13x9x2 inch baking dish.
3. Place about ¼ cup of filling lengthwise down the center of the crepe.
4. Fold or roll up the crepe, and place it seam- side down in the dish.
5. Continue filling the remaining crepes, leaving a small space between crepes to allow for expansion during baking.
6. Cover the folded manicotti with marinara sauce.
7. Top with grated cheese.
8. Bake immediately or refrigerate until ready to bake.
9. Bake for 30 to 40 minutes, or until sauce is bubbling and manicotti is heated thoroughly.
10. Serve hot.

## **Suggestions**

- Manicotti works well as a standalone meal with a mixed salad or side vegetables, such as spinach, and French bread to lap up the extra sauce.
- Manicotti fillings can be modified with chopped spinach, ground beef or turkey, and different cheeses.
- Cannelloni is a dish quite similar to manicotti with longer pasta shells or crepes. It is very popular in Italy.
- Manicotti can also be covered with a meat sauce or Italian Sunday Gravy instead of marinara sauce to create a more complete one-course meal.