

The BEST Plant-Based Bolognese

Swick

Makes 8.0 cups | Active Time: 30 minutes | Total Time: 1 hour

Step 1: Preparing the Your Mise en Place

- 1 - 8 oz pkg extra firm tofu
 - 1 onion, finely diced
 - 2 tbsp minced garlic
 - 1/2 lb cremini mushrooms (approx 4 cups)
 - 1 cup walnuts
 - 1 1/2 cup cooked brown lentils (or 1-14 oz can)
 - 1 1/2 tsp dried basil
 - 1 tsp dried oregano
 - 1 tsp fennel seeds
 - 1 tsp paprika
 - 1/4 tsp cayenne
 - 1 tsp chili flakes (optional)
 - 1 to 2 tbsp soy sauce
 - 1 - 6 oz can tomato paste (approx. 7 tbsp)
 - 4 to 6 cups tomato sauce (or 1 - 22 oz/680 ml jar)*
- To prepare your mise en place, first, drain the tofu and then break it into smaller pieces.
- Next, prepare the onion and garlic. For the mushrooms, place them into a food processor and pulse a few times, until just a bit smaller than a pea. Remove and set aside.
- For the walnuts, pulse a few times or until they are quite fine. Remove and set aside.
- For the lentils, either use cooked lentils that you make or use precooked canned lentils (which we often use).
- Lastly, gather the remaining ingredients.
- For the tomato sauce, we use our own homemade tomato sauce. However, if you are short on time, this Arrabbiata Sauce from Rao's is fantastic. Note: if using the Arrabbiata sauce, you may want to omit the chili flakes from the recipe.
- The amount of tomato sauce you add will ultimately depend on personal preference and also how you intend to use the final tomato sauce. For example, if I am serving it as a sauce, I often add 6 cups (2 jars) of sauce.

Step 2: Starting the Sauce

- 2 to 4 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
 - sea salt
- To start the sauce, heat a large deep-sided pan over medium-high heat.
- Once hot, add the oil, followed by the onions as well as a good pinch of salt.
- Let the onions cook for approximately 7 to 10 minutes, or until they caramelize and become translucent.
- Next, add the tofu and continue to sauté for a few minutes. If needed, add a touch more oil to prevent the tofu from sticking and burning. Once the tofu has just started to brown add the fennel seeds and continue to cook.
- Once the tofu has browned nicely, add the mushrooms and another good pinch of salt and let cook for approximately 5 minutes, or until all of their moisture has evaporated.
- Lastly, add the garlic and let cook for 30 seconds or so and then add the walnuts, spices, soy sauce, and lentils and stir to combine.

Step 3: Finishing the Sauce

- sea salt, to taste
- freshly ground black pepper, to taste

To finish the sauce, add the tomato paste to the pan and let cook for another 30 seconds or so and then add the tomato sauce. If the mixture seems a bit too thick, add 1/2 cup or so of water, tomato juice or the reserved lentil liquid. Bring the mixture to a boil and then turn the heat down and let simmer, partially covered with a lid.

Let the sauce cook for approximately an hour — or longer (up to 2 to 2 1/2 hours), the longer the sauce cooks the more intense and rich the final sauce will be. Stir regularly to ensure the sauce does not burn. If at any point the sauce looks too thick, add a touch more water. Ideally, the sauce should be thick but not so thick that it has no movement or fluidity to it. With that said, ultimately, the final consistency is up to you and how you plan to use it.

Lastly, taste the sauce for seasoning, adding more salt, pepper as desired.

Serve this sauce with your favorite pasta, spiraled vegetables or sautéed spaghetti squash.

- omit basil and fennel seeds (from above)
- 2 tbsp + 1 tsp Chili Powder
- 1 tsp cumin powder
- 1 1/2 tsp Mexican oregano
- 1 tbsp cocoa powder
- 1 to 2 can(s) kidney beans
- 1 jalapeño, minced
- fresh cilantro, for garnish

To turn this sauce into a chili, rather than a Bolognese sauce, simply follow the recipe above but when it gets to adding the spices, add the spices listed here as well (omitting the basil and fennel seeds). This is also when you would add the kidney beans. For the kidney beans, you can either cook your own or use canned. The amount of kidney beans used ultimately depends on your personal preference.

This is the recipe we use for the Chili Powder — we really like to make our own as we can control the spice level and it's always consistent but a store-bought one would also work — maybe just start with a bit less.

For the jalapeño, add it at the same time as the onions or use it to garnish the chili.

Then continue to follow the recipe as above and cook until done. Once done, garnish the chili as desired. We like to garnish it with a good dollop of Cashew Sour Cream, fresh cilantro, and a wedge of lime.

Chef's Notes

Leftovers of this delicious sauce will keep for several days in the refrigerator. Alternatively, this sauce also freezes really well, which really makes for a great dinner one night when you are busy — all you have to do is defrost the sauce, cook some pasta and make a salad and dinner is ready.

A note about making this ahead of time. If you are planning to make this ahead of time, which is totally fine — even if you make it a day or two in advance, it's a good idea to just cook it to about the 90% mark. By that we mean to leave it a bit wet with the tomato sauce, that way when you heat it up later it will still have time to heat up without drying out too much. With that said, you may still need to add a bit of tomato sauce when heating up.