

Sunday Gravy

Introduction

Let's get this straight from the start. It's not "tomato sauce", it's *GRAVY*. If you can't get past that, stop reading now and head to Olive Garden for dinner. OK, now that we've settled that, a few ground rules:

- 1) You don't "make" gravy or "cook" gravy: you sorta *BEGET* gravy.
- 2) The main ingredient is LOVE. If you don't love your gravy, and infuse it with love from the start, it just won't be gravy. You gotta love everything from your pot to your can opener to your "*goopeen*" (that's phonetic spelling for the big stirring spoon, also used by mom as a disciplinary aid).
- 3) A word about substitutions: You can be creative, but only within the boundaries articulated in this recipe. Be respectful! I've actually heard stories about people adding *-gulp-* Ragu sauce from a jar to the gravy. This is blasphemy of the highest order. Don't even think about it. There's a reason *Ragu* rhymes with *Taboo*! And don't get me started on the whole Paul Newman sauce thing. I mean, really: *PAUL NEWMAN sauce from a jar?*

Tools Required

- Cork screw
- 12 oz glass (stem-less wine glass preferred for reasons that will become clear below). Fru-fru wine glasses like Riedl are not permitted
- Can opener
- Large pot
- Large wooden stirring spoon (aka "*goopeen*"). If needed, metal spoon is acceptable. Under no circumstances is plastic permissible.
- Cutting board
- Chopping knife or cleaver
- Soup spoon (tea spoon may be substituted)
- Music: Frank Sinatra. In extreme circumstances, allowable substitutes include Tony Bennett, Dean Martin, Mario Lanza or Luciano Pavarotti.

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Ingredients

- 1-2 bottles of Chianti. If absolutely necessary, the following may be substituted:

- Valpolicella
- Montepulciano
- Barbera

Note: do not even try to use Cabernet, Pinot Noir or- God forbid- Merlot. If one of these is your preference, abandon the whole Gravy idea and go out for Chinese food on Christmas Eve.

- 1 loaf of Italian bread, preferably a *panella* (that's the big round loaf) or semolina loaf with sesame seeds. No substitutions permitted. Gravy will simply not associate itself with Wonder Bread or Pepperridge Farms. Needless to say, French bread is out of the question.

- Tomato Products:

- 3 large (32 oz) cans of Tomato Puree
- 3 large (32 oz) cans of Tomato Sauce
- 1 large (12 oz) can of Tomato Paste

Note: For larger gatherings, you can simply use the proportions in this recipe as a guide for making larger vats of gravy.

Admission: We use a short cut in this recipe. Since getting good tomatoes isn't possible year 'round, we use canned tomato products. However, there are standards that must be met. Permissible brands include Contadina, Progresso, and Tutto Rosso. If you prefer Hunts or Heinz brands, skip this recipe and just pour catsup on your macaroni.

- 1 large garlic clove
- 1 large onion
- 4-5 bay leaves
- Oregano flakes
- Parsley flakes
- Grated parmesan cheese
- Salt
- Pepper
- 2-3 pork neck bones
- Olive oil

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Procedure

1. Set up
 - a. Open one wine bottle. Discard cork (it will just get in the way)
 - b. Pour a generous glass and take a few warm-up sips
 - c. Open all cans, stack on the counter neatly
 - d. Peel and slice garlic- the thinner the better. Some like to use a razor blade to get paper-thin slices that melt nicely
 - e. Peel and chop the onion. If your eyes tear up, just tell witnesses you were thinking about mamma.
 - f. Put the big pot on a stove burner; repeat step 1.b.
2. Prepare the base
 - a. Pour olive oil into pot- a thin layer that covers entire bottom of pot to about 1/8"
 - b. Turn up heat (not too high!) until oil is hot, but not "popping"!
 - c. Add garlic and onions, stirring lovingly until garlic begins to melt
 - d. Add neck bones, stirring occasionally as they brown
 - e. Once neck bones have browned a bit, stir in tomato paste and reduce heat
 - f. Simmer 7-8 minutes (or 1-1.5 glasses of wine, whichever comes first)
3. Build the sauce
 - a. Add all of the tomato sauce and tomato puree to the pot, stirring so the "base" is not sitting on the bottom of the pot
 - b. Add bay leaves
 - c. Raise heat to about 1/2, until you see first bubbles, then reduce to simmer
 - d. Add a punch of each: grated cheese, oregano, parsley
 - e. Add about 4 oz of Chianti. *Note: For reasons that I cannot fathom, some people actually substitute sugar in this step. If you do that, please don't let me find out.*
 - f. Look on admiringly while repeating step 1.b.
4. Simmer time
 - a. Cover the pot loosely (ie, leave a little space for air!)
 - b. Stir clockwise every 10 mins or so.
 - c. Rip off a chunk of Italian bread for sampling approximately every 10-15 minutes. Note: for best results, synchronize gravy sampling with generous sips of Chianti.
 - d. If stirring spoon stands on its own, gravy might be little too thick- feel free to stir in a couple of ounces of water
 - e. Simmer 45-60 minutes or until drunk

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Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. What about adding meat to gravy?*
If you've made meatballs, sausage, bracciole, etc, make sure they're not completely cooked when you add to the gravy. Best bet is to add them at "simmer time" above, and let them finish cooking in the gravy. Adding meat to gravy definitely changes the flavor and texture (for the better!).
- 2. How do I serve gravy?*
Put the stuff on your pasta, use it for chicken or veal parm- what the hell else would you do with it?
- 3. Can I Freeze Gravy?*
I get this question a lot, which leads me to believe that there are actually cases in which some people have gravy left after a meal. I suppose that could happen- hypothetically. The answer is YES, gravy does freeze well, although I'm not sure how to thaw it "lovingly". I've heard stories about gravy tasting fine after having been frozen for over 3 months!
- 4. What do I do with the left over Chianti?*
This is another hypothetical question. I've heard reports of people putting the cork back into a ½ empty bottle, but I've never witnessed this in person.
- 5. What is the best kind of pasta to place under Sunday Gravy?*
This is a trick question, because ANY pasta tastes great when swimming in Sunday Gravy. Fortunately, Sunday Gravy is so good that it even makes store-bought brands (like Ronzoni or Barilla) edible. Of course, if you can find a legit Italian food store that makes its own pasta, you must go with that. Personally, I like the types that act like little "gravy pipes" such as ziti and rigatoni.