

Pork Ragu for a Crowd

Adapted from Big Night In by Domenica Marchetti (Chronicle Books, 2008)

Domenica isn't kidding when she says this recipe feeds a crowd. It filled my Dutch oven nearly to the brim and produced so much loveliness I brought several cups to my neighbor and froze a good portion for future meals. She also indicates it gets better if made ahead of time and reheated.

I hewed extremely closely to her recipe, but did use bulk sausage and cooked the sauce/stew a bit longer than indicated to make the meat even more tender. I also left out the rosemary, a genuine oversight since my front yard sports a rosemary bush bigger than Shrek.

Serves 12

3 pounds boneless pork shoulder (Boston butt), in one or two pieces
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
3 large yellow onions, diced (5 cups)
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup dry red wine
7 cups chopped canned tomatoes with their juices
4 bay leaves
A sprig or two of rosemary, or not
1 pound mild Italian pork sausage
Cooked short pasta, for serving, plus freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Season the pork shoulder well with salt and pepper. Heat the oil in a large, heavy-bottomed Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Brown the pork on all sides, 3 to 4 minutes per side, until it is evenly seared. This will take a good 15 minutes. Remove pork to a large bowl or plate.

Reduce heat to medium and add the onions and garlic, stirring well to coat with the oil. Sauté until translucent, about 10 minutes. Add the pork back to the pot, raise the heat to medium-high, and pour in the wine. Let it boil for a minute before adding the tomatoes, bay leaves, and rosemary, if you remember it. Reduce the heat to medium-low.

If using bulk sausage, break it into little clumps and add it to the pot. If using sausage links, remove the casings and squeeze the meat into the pot, breaking it up well. Give a good stir, cover, and simmer very gently for 2-1/2 hours (I simmered closer to 3 hours and turned the heat down to low), or until the meat is fork tender. Remove the meat to a cutting board and shred it. (At this point, I discarded any wayward globs of fat still attached to the meat.) Return the meat to the pot and heat the ragu through. Adjust the salt if desired.

Serve with cooked pasta and top with grated Parmesan cheese.

(Domenica indicates that this recipe serves 12 -- or enough for 3 pounds of pasta.)

Cool any leftovers, and freeze, if desired, in quart-sized containers.