

11 Variations for Jarred Pasta Sauce

From Jenni Field's Pastry Chef Online

I pride myself on whipping up a mean pasta sauce, but sometimes, it's nice to have some jarred sauce in the cupboard. Here are eleven ideas for doctoring up a 1-quart jar of regular pasta sauce so you can get a weeknight dinner on the table quickly!



1. **Thick and Intense Sauce:** Drain sauce through a pre-wetted coffee filter until it is as thick as you would like it. Use to toss with pasta or as a pizza sauce.
2. **Caramelized Onion and Balsamic Sauce:** For each quart of sauce, stir in 1 cup chopped caramelized onions and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup balsamic vinegar. Simmer for 15 minutes. To caramelize onions: slice onions thinly and cook them in a large skillet in a Tablespoon or two of olive oil, a pinch of salt and pepper. Cook over medium low heat, stirring often, until deeply golden brown, about 30-40 minutes.
3. **Italian Sausage Sauce:** For each quart of sauce, brown $\frac{1}{2}$ pound sweet or hot Italian sausage. Make sure to crumble it really well. Drain off excess fat and stir in the sauce. Simmer for 15 minutes.
4. **Intensely Tomato Sauce:** Drain 1 quart of sauce so you are left with 3-3 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups. Pour in a pan and add 3 Tablespoons minced, oil-packed sundried tomatoes, 2 Tablespoons tomato paste and a heavy pinch of salt. Simmer 15 minutes. Taste and adjust seasonings as necessary. Just before serving, stir in a Tablespoon of fresh, minced basil.
5. **Creamy Tomato Sauce:** Pour one quart of sauce into a sauce pan and heat until hot. Cut up 1 3oz block of cream cheese into small pieces and stir into the sauce until melted. Taste and adjust seasoning if necessary.
6. **Vodka Sauce:** Pour one quart of sauce into a coffee filter-lined strainer and let drain until you have 3 cups left. Put that in a sauce pan and add $\frac{3}{4}$ cups vodka. Simmer until you have 3 cups of sauce again. Add 6 Tablespoons heavy cream and a shake or two of pepper flake. Puree. Stir in 3 Tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan until melted. Taste and adjust salt and pepper if necessary.
7. **Mushroom Sauce:** In a large skillet, heat 2 Tablespoons olive oil until hot. Add 4 oz sliced mushrooms, a bit of kosher salt and black pepper and the leaves from 4-5 stems of thyme. If you don't have fresh, use $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon Italian seasoning or dried thyme leaves. Cook until the mushrooms have given up most of their liquid, are darker in color and have shrunk substantially. Add 4 oz dry red wine and simmer until almost dry. Add 1 quart of pasta sauce to the pan, stir well and simmer for 15 minutes (longer if you'd like the sauce thicker). Taste and adjust seasonings if necessary.
8. **Florentine Sauce:** Drain 1 quart of pasta sauce through a coffee filter until you have about 3 cups. Add 3 large handfuls of baby spinach and simmer until the spinach has wilted into the sauce. Stir in one cup of ricotta cheese and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup finely grated Parmesan cheese. Taste and adjust seasonings. You can also add a few gratings of fresh nutmeg if you'd like.

9. **Bolognese Sauce:** Brown $\frac{3}{4}$ pound ground beef in a bit of olive oil, salt and pepper. Crumble it really well. Add a cup of dry white or red wine and cook down until almost dry. Add a quart of pasta sauce and simmer for 20 minutes. Stir in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup whole milk. Taste and adjust seasonings, going a bit heavy on the freshly ground black pepper.
10. **Arrabiata Sauce:** Saute $\frac{1}{2}$ chopped yellow onion and 2 cloves minced garlic in 2 Tablespoons olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Pour in one quart of pasta sauce and 1 full teaspoon of red pepper flake (more if you like things really spicy). Simmer for 15 minutes.
11. **Puttanesca Sauce:** Heat 3 Tablespoons olive oil in a skillet over medium-low heat. Add 3 cloves of minced garlic and 2-3 chopped anchovy fillets (or a good tablespoon of anchovy paste) and cook slowly until the garlic is soft and the anchovies have “melted” into the oil. Add a quart of pasta sauce, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pitted and chopped Kalamata olives and 2 Tablespoons drained capers. Simmer 15 minutes. Taste and adjust seasonings as necessary.