

Home-made Tomato Paste For Pizza Or Pasta.



The best home-baked pizzas use home-made tomato paste.

The secret to making your own pizzas lies not just in the dough, but also in the quality of the tomato paste. Yes, it's a bit of time and effort, but it make a big difference to the overall taste of the product. I make a huge batch and then freeze into smaller portions. It defrosts really well. The quantities given here mean that, if you only cater for your family, you should have enough for about three months' worth of pizzas. However, if you are prone to inviting others around for pizza parties, it may not last so well.

The first thing you must worry about are the fresh tomatoes:



Tomatoes ripening - to be used in pizza paste/sauce

Remember, Italian food is about taking time. Slow food is not just about eating slowly and enjoying your meal, but also about allowing things to take their time, such as waiting for the tomatoes to ripen outside the fridge. I certainly feel very warm and smug looking at the large basket of tomatoes ripening away – even over-ripe is great for this paste. It is no surprise that the Slow Food Revolution: A New Culture for Eating and Living was initiated in, and has its spiritual base in Italy.

The tomatoes I advocate are jam or paste tomatoes. They are sweeter than the ordinary variety. However, any kind of tomato will do.

Pizza Tomato Paste Recipe

8 kg of jam tomatoes (18 lb.)
8 onions
8 Tablespoons balsamic vinegar - or more
2 Tablespoons sea salt
4 Tablespoons sugar

Optional: 1/2 bottle red wine, for added depth and flavour, but not essential in the slightest. Also, the addition of this will make your cooking time a little longer.

If the above, industrial quantities are a bit much for you, then the ratios are as follows:

For every two pounds or one kilogram of tomatoes,
I use one medium onion
and about a quarter to a third of a bulb of garlic.

Garlic, again, is one of those aspects left to taste, as are the additions of red wine, sugar, salt and balsamic vinegar. And part of making the taste wonderfully complex and full of depth is: time. Yet again, low heat, long cooking brings out the best flavours.

Heat onions in an oil that is not olive oil – it goes bitter. I mostly use grape seed oil, with a bit of butter added for taste. Just make sure the onions are lightly coated. The longer you can caramelize the onions, the better, but make sure they don't burn. If they do catch a bit, then add some red wine or balsamic vinegar to the pan to deglaze. Once well caramelised, or at least translucent, add the finely chopped garlic to brown. I then usually use the hand blender, which you can hold in the pan itself to chop the onions very fine (I have chopped them in a liquidiser previous to putting in the pan, but they tend to go a sickly green colour – does not affect the final taste, but between the amount of extra effort involved and the tears that run copiously down your face, it is best avoided).

The tomatoes require an industrial approach:



Industrial process at work to make tomato paste

From left, ripe tomatoes. Cut the ends off the tomatoes and place in a large pot of boiling water. When the skin starts peeling off, then skin and de-seed the tomatoes. I normally have a container where I leave the tomatoes to cool, before placing into the colander and sieve that fits into my Kenwood mixer. Although this machine makes quick work of it, I have done it by hand, waiting for the tomatoes to cool to skin, and then extracting the pulp with a sieve and wooden spoon.



Tomatoes are skinned, then the tomato mixture is placed into pots

Add all the tomato mixture, which will be light orange and very, very liquid, to the onions in the pan. Add red wine, a touch of balsamic vinegar, some salt and a bit of sugar to the mixture and bring to the boil.



Tomato paste: start of reduction process

With all additions, be careful initially, you can always add later, but not subtract – and too much red wine can make it bitter. With all of the last to taste and you don't have to use the red wine, it just adds lovely deep colours and layers of taste to the paste), then simmer until the liquid is reduced by almost half to a thick, dark red-orange paste.



Pizza tomato paste simmering away and reducing gradually

You can count on it taking about a day or so. When I am in the kitchen, I switch it on to simmer every now and again, making sure that it does not catch. This is Italian slow food at its best, but it is simply superb on the pizza.



Note how much darker the tomato paste is, and how much it has reduced

VERY IMPORTANT: The tomato paste must be cold or room temperature before using on the pizza. If you put it on hot, then the dough underneath starts to cook and it all gets very sticky and slimey and it is awful. So making the paste the day before is advocated, leave it to stand overnight in the pot, so the flavours can really talk to each other. I always make about 16 kg in advance and it lasts me about 2-3 months, if I don't have large functions. Apart from defrosting quickly and easily it also keeps in the fridge relatively well since there are no meat products involved.



Home-made pizza tomato paste makes all the difference to the taste of your pizza

The tomato paste can also be used as the basis for a pasta sauce, or an accompaniment to eggs. The tomato paste also makes a perfect base for a tomato-based pasta sauce, such as the one shown here which was made using the left-overs from a pizza evening. That way you get two meals out of one, and the anchovies, olives, and mushrooms do not go to waste:



Home-made paste used as base for pasta sauce with olives, anchovies, mushrooms and chillies

20th April 2011 by Kathryn Kure

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