

September 16, 2015

Sauce Basics for the Freezer

The new school year coincides with the conventional harvest season. Traditionally it has been a time for preparing and preserving whatever you can. For busy modern families, it pays to put some basics in the freezer for those nights when no one has time to pick up the slack.

You'll get a lot of mileage from pre-making and freezing tomato sauce for quick, easy meals. Toss it with pasta. Just add cheese and meat, and if you keep some Freezer Ground Beef Base on hand, you're basically set for a quick Bolognese sauce.

FREEZER TOMATO SAUCE

Ingredients:

4 lb (2 kg) Roma tomatoes, quartered and seeded
4 cloves garlic, crushed
1/4 cup (50 mL) extra-virgin olive oil, divided
2 cups (500 mL) diced onions
1 cup (250 mL) diced carrots
1 cup (250 mL) diced celery
1 can (14 oz/398 mL) crushed tomatoes
2 cups (500 mL) water
1 tsp (5 mL) salt
1/2 tsp (2 mL) balsamic vinegar

Method:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C).
2. Combine tomatoes, garlic and 2 tbsp (25 mL) oil in a large bowl; toss until coated.
3. Place tomato mixture in a single layer on two non-stick foil-lined large rimmed baking sheets.
4. Bake, uncovered, for 45 – 50 minutes or until tomatoes are softened and lightly browned.

5. Meanwhile, heat remaining 2 tbsp (25 mL) oil in a non-reactive Dutch oven over low heat. Add onions, carrots and celery; cook, stirring frequently, until vegetables are tender and starting to brown, about 20 minutes.
6. Increase heat to medium. Add tomato mixture, crushed tomatoes, water and salt; stir to combine. Bring to a boil.
7. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, for 45 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in vinegar.
8. Purée mixture in batches in a blender, filling blender no more than half full for each batch.
9. Transfer tomato sauce to a large bowl.
10. Cool sauce quickly by placing bowl in a sink of ice water and stirring sauce frequently to allow steam to escape. Do not allow ice water to enter bowl.
11. Spoon cooled sauce into freezer containers and freeze for up to 3 months.
12. Thaw sauce in refrigerator. Makes about 7 cups (1.75 L).

FREEZER GROUND BEEF BASE

Ingredients:

- 5 lb (2.5 kg) lean ground beef
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) canola oil
- 3 cups (750 mL) chopped onions
- 1 1/2 cups (375 mL) chopped celery
- 1/3 cup (75 mL) chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) Worcestershire sauce
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

Method:

1. In a large non-stick frypan over medium heat, cook beef in batches, stirring to break up beef, until browned and cooked through.
2. Using a slotted spoon, transfer beef to a large bowl; set aside. Drain off excess fat from frypan.
3. Heat oil in same frypan over medium heat. Add onions and celery; sauté until softened, about 5 minutes.



4. Add parsley, Worcestershire sauce and garlic; cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Remove from heat.
5. Add onion mixture to beef; stir to combine.
6. Cool beef mixture quickly by placing bowl in a sink of ice water and stirring beef mixture frequently to allow steam to escape. Do not allow ice water to enter bowl.
7. Spoon cooled beef mixture into freezer containers and freeze for up to 2 months.
8. Thaw beef mixture in refrigerator and use once thawed. Makes about 15 cups (3.75 L).

Cook's Note: One pound (0.5 kg) lean ground beef yields about 2 1/2 cups (625 mL) cooked ground beef. Freezing this recipe in amounts of 2 1/2 cups (625 mL) gives one the option to substitute it in recipes that call for 1 lb (0.5 kg) lean ground beef that gets cooked.