

2 lbs ripe tomatoes
1 head of garlic, peeled and chopped
¼ cup good olive oil
pinch to ½ tsp red pepper flakes
Kosher or sea salt, coarse
1 lb spaghetti (or other long, thin pasta)
10-20 leaves of fresh basil
8-16 oz fresh mozzarella cheese

Put a large pot of water on to boil. Prepare a large bowl of ice water, and place a mesh strainer inside of another bowl. Rinse tomatoes, then cut a small X on the bottom of each. Prepare garlic by peeling and then chopping each clove. When the water boils, turn it down to a simmer and, using a spider or similar utensil, drop 3-4 tomatoes into the water. In about 30 seconds, you should see the X lengthening. Immediately remove the tomatoes from the hot water and plunge them into the ice water. Add more tomatoes to the hot water, and then quickly pull the skin off of the first batch, placing the skinned tomatoes into the strainer. At this point, the next batch will be ready to come out of the water. Continue this process until all the tomatoes are finished. Empty the ice water, as well as any water that has dripped from the tomatoes. Now place the tomatoes into a bowl, and place the strainer over the other bowl.

If necessary, add more water to the pot. You will need enough to boil 1 lb of pasta soon. Place the pot on a back burner and turn the heat up to high.

Now place a skillet on over medium-low heat and add the olive oil. Immediately place the chopped garlic in and stir it around a little, just to coat the garlic and spread it throughout the pan. This will warm together slowly, flavoring the oil and softening the garlic at the same time.

Meanwhile, cut the stem end out of the tomatoes, working over the strainer, and then seed the tomatoes. They should be soft enough to just pull apart with your hands, which will help you to reserve all of the juice. Place the flesh in the bowl underneath the strainer. When all the tomatoes are seeded, squish the seeds and gel around with your hands to break them up, the swish them around, against the mesh of the strainer, to help push the liquid through to the bowl. Discard seeds and rinse out your strainer. Now strain the flesh with your spider or slotted spoon, and place it into the other bowl. Reserve the juice.

Turn the heat up to high on the skillet. Once you see some light golden color on the garlic, add the red pepper flakes. After about 10 seconds, add the tomato flesh and sprinkle with salt. Stir to coat the tomatoes with oil and spread across the bottom of the pan.

Add pasta to the boiling water and stir well. Cook just to al dente (follow the instructions on the box, and check it at the earliest time; drain when it is still just slightly firm). Remember to save a bit of the cooking water.

Once tomatoes have broken down to a chunky sauce consistency, add the juice and continue to cook over high heat about 5 minutes.

Stack basil leaves, putting the largest one on the bottom. Roll them up and slice thinly across the roll, creating ribbons. Turn the heat off, sprinkle the basil into the sauce and stir. Add drained spaghetti and toss to coat, slowly adding some of the cooking water to loosen, if necessary.

Add cubed mozzarella to the spaghetti and toss, covering up as much of the cheese as you can. After a few minutes, it is ready to serve.