

BEST & WORST

WE TESTED 11 PASTA SAUCES, AND THIS IS THE BEST!



By April Benshosan

Pasta sauce, [spaghetti](#) sauce, red sauce, marinara—whatever you wish to call it, we've discovered which brand is worth the ultimate Italian chef kiss.

Ladled over piping hot pasta or just spooned atop fresh Italian bread, pasta sauce is a common pantry staple that's as versatile as the recipes that call for it. The problem is that marinara is more than just tomatoes. And a good jarred variety can be daunting to find, especially when each and every supermarket seems to stock up on countless offerings. That's why we've spared you the guesswork by dipping a slice of fresh sprouted toast (over ciabatta, because health) into 11 popular pasta sauces, and then ranked them based on Nutrition, Clean Ingredients, Appearance and Consistency, and of course, Taste. Yes, we tested 11 pasta toppers... just for you.

Read on to find out which red sauce stole our hearts and which didn't quite make the cut. And while you're swapping out your subpar sauce for our top pick, consider switching your usual noodle for one of these [10 Pulse Pastas You Need In Your Life](#).

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HOW WE GRADED THEM



Here are the four metrics we used to determine each sauce's final grade.

Nutrition

We know that a dish of comforting pasta can be easily tarnished by a sauce that's stuffed with extra calories, sodium, and sugar. But what about fat? Tomatoes are brimming with vitamin A, a fat-soluble vitamin that requires some healthy oil for your body to fully reap its benefits. To sift the good sauces from the bad, make sure your pick packs in omega-3-rich olive oil rather than inflammatory soybean and canola oils.

Clean Ingredients

The perfect pasta sauce requires a little more than just a fresh batch of tomatoes. We commend brands that blend aromatic spices and heart-healthy oils into their sauces, but frown upon those that use inflammatory oils and unnecessary additives.

Appearance & Consistency

Pasta sauce should coat your noodles and cling to your casserole's crevices effortlessly. A thin and runny one simply won't do the trick.

Taste

Probably the utmost important factor, taste plays a significant role when it comes to which sauce we decide to slather our spaghetti with. A winning marinara should be bursting with fresh flavors, boast a delicate sweet to salty to tart balance, and complement rather than overpower your culinary creation.

FROM WORST... TO BEST

11 BARILLA MARINARA

Nutrition: Per 1/2 cup, 125 g: 70 calories, 1 g fat (0 g saturated fat), 420 mg sodium, 14 g carbs (3 g fiber, 8 g sugar), 3 g protein

Ingredients: Tomato Puree (Water, Tomato Paste), Diced Tomatoes (Tomatoes, Citric Acid), Sugar, Dried Onions, Dehydrated Garlic, Salt, Basil, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Oregano, Citric Acid, Natural Flavor

Appearance & Consistency: Barilla's rendition was a bit on the thick side. It was smooth due to the tomato puree.

Taste: If I could go back in time and undo dipping my spoon into this jar, or just putting the utensil down before it makes its way onto my tongue, or... you get the point. The oddly overwhelming garlic flavor and exceptionally bitter aftertaste made me wonder if I just picked up a bad batch.

Eat This, Not That! Verdict:

If you're into that overpowering artificial tomato flavor coupled with excessive garlic and unmissable bitterness, this one's for you. Texture wise, this sauce can coat your carbs well—but we're not sure if you'd be able to stomach them considering the sauce's disagreeable flavor notes.

Buy a 24-oz. jar now for \$1.99 at [Amazon](#).

10

EMERIL'S HOMESTYLE MARINARA

Nutrition: Per 1/2 cup, 124 g: 90 calories, 3 g fat (0 g saturated fat), 430 mg sodium, 14 g carbs (3 g fiber, 9 g sugar), 2 g protein

Ingredients: Tomato Puree (Water, Tomato Paste), Diced Tomatoes (Tomatoes, Tomato Juice, Citric Acid), Sugar, Soybean Oil, Salt, Minced Onions, Spice, Garlic Powder, Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Appearance & Consistency: Emeril's Homestyle Marinara is thick and significantly denser than the other offerings tested, which we liked. Its brick-like color and consistently pureed texture masked any potential spice sighting.

Taste: This is where Emeril's lost us. It was sweeter than any of the other saucy toppings I tested, which justifies the fact that sugar is the third ingredient on the list.

Eat This, Not That! Verdict:

Since Emeril is an accredited chef, owner of 14 restaurants, and honorary doctorate degree recipient, we expected his sauce to boast the rich flavors of quality spices and fresh tomatoes rather than excessive sugar. We wouldn't go as far as saying that dumping this sauce onto your spaghetti regularly will cause diabetes, but we can't promise you won't experience some of these weird [side effects of eating sugar](#).

Buy 6 25-oz. jars now for \$28.11 at [Amazon](#).

9

BERTOLLI TOMATO & BASIL

Nutrition: Per 1/2 cup, 125 g: 80 calories, 2 g fat (0 g saturated fat), 350 mg sodium, 13 g carbs (1 g fiber, 11 g sugar), 2 g protein

Ingredients: Diced Tomatoes In Juice [Diced Tomatoes, Tomato Juice, Calcium Chloride (Firming Aid), Citric Acid], Tomato Puree (Water, Tomato Paste), Basil, Sugar, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Onions, Salt, Garlic, Spices, Natural Flavors

Appearance & Consistency: Bertolli's sauce is like Christmas all bottled up: it's chock full of green basil flakes floating around in a deep red, extra chunky sauce.

Taste: Popping this jar open was like sticking my nose directly into a basil plant. Unfortunately, the nauseating level of sweetness overpowered both the bright basil and tomato.

Eat This, Not That! Verdict:

We truly wish this sauce was lower in sugar because it had massive potential—before we dolloped the stuff onto a slice of toast. The lumpiness (most likely due to the added calcium chloride) also didn't work in Bertolli's favor.

Buy a 24-oz. jar now for \$2.49 at [Amazon](#).

8

RAGU OLD WORLD STYLE TRADITIONAL

Nutrition: Per 1/2 cup, 125 g: 80 calories, 2 g fat (0 g saturated fat), 480 mg sodium, 13 g carbs (2 g fiber, 8 g sugar), 2 g protein

Ingredients: Tomato Puree (Water, Tomato Paste), Soybean Oil, Salt, Sugar, Dehydrated Onions, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Spices, Romano Cheese Made From Cow's Milk (Cultured Part-Skim Milk, Salt, Enzymes), Natural Flavors

Appearance & Consistency: Upon twisting open this jar of Ragu, I immediately noticed the chunks floating atop an otherwise runny orange-red sauce. One simple stir confirmed that this sauce isn't very hearty.

Taste: Average; mediocre; nothing special. This sauce didn't pack in an extra umami punch, even though Ragu sprinkled romano cheese into the mix. In fact, it could've ranked a bit higher on this list if it slashed off a few grams of sugar.

Eat This, Not That! Verdict:

Ragu loudly spells out "Our Richest, Thickest Recipe" on its label, but definitely doesn't deliver. The added Romano cheese didn't lend any richness to this pasta topper, let alone thicken it up. Besides lacking in the taste and texture departments, Ragu didn't impress us nutritionally either, given the sodium and sugar contents per serving are sky high.

Buy a 45-oz. jar now for \$3.19 at [Amazon](#).

7

NEWMAN'S OWN MARINARA

Nutrition: Per 1/2 cup, 125 g: 70 calories, 1 g fat (0 g saturated fat), 460 mg sodium, 12 g carbs (3 g fiber, 7 g sugar), 3 g protein

Ingredients: Tomato Puree (Water, Tomato Paste, Citric Acid), Diced Tomatoes, Salt, Cane Sugar, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Spices, Dried Onion, Dried Garlic

Appearance & Consistency: A quick glance at the ingredient list, which essentially lists H2O first, explains why this sauce's consistency seems watered down.

Taste: The overly salty sauce's subpar flavor did not impress us at all. Despite the delicious ingredients it uses, Newman's Own doesn't taste like it's rife with garlic, onion, or robust spices.

Eat This, Not That! Verdict:

Newman's Own had a pleasant tomato basil scent that was quite reminiscent of a fresh margherita slice. Much to our disappointment, it didn't taste like one. We're guessing this sauce would pair well with a heartier dish that can make up for the sauce's mediocrity. Three cheese lasagna, anyone?

Buy a 24-oz. jar now for \$10.65 at [Amazon](#).

6

CUCINA ANTICA TOMATO BASIL

Nutrition: Per 1/2 cup, 113 g: 35 calories, 1.5 g fat (1 g saturated fat), 240 mg sodium, 6 g carbs (2 g fiber, 1 g sugar), 1 g protein

Ingredients: Imported Italian San Marzano Tomatoes, Tomatoes, Fresh Onions, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Salt, Basil, White Pepper, Black Pepper

Appearance & Consistency: As contradictory as it seems, Cucina Antica somehow managed to make a sauce that's simultaneously chunky and runny.

Taste: The basil shreds were visible to the eye, but undetectable to the taste buds. Unfortunately, this sauce was lacking the authentic flavor its packaging foreshadowed.

Eat This, Not That! Verdict:

Considering the rustic labeling and Italian name that translates to "antique kitchen," we expected this sauce to boast more pronounced Mediterranean flavors. Rather than getting a refreshing whiff of tomato and basil, my nostrils were hit with an unpalatable dish detergent scent. My colleague even affirmed that the taste is almost Windex-like, too. What in the world? Yeah, we were confused, to say the least.

Buy 3 24-oz. jars now for \$25.64 at [Amazon](#).

5 PREGO MARINARA



Nutrition: Per 1/2 cup: 80 calories, 3 g fat (0.5 g saturated fat), 480 mg sodium, 10 g carbs (3 g fiber, 7 g sugar), 2 g protein

Ingredients: Tomato Puree (Water, Tomato Paste), Diced Tomatoes In Tomato Juice, Canola Oil, Salt, Dehydrated Onions, Dehydrated Garlic, Spice, Citric Acid

Appearance & Consistency: Everything you'd expect from a store bought marinara: it's consistent texture- and color-wise, and offers zero surprises in the form of spice flecks or garlic chunks.

Taste: Prego had a very classic, traditional flavor. Although it's packed with almost 500 milligrams of sodium, this sauce wasn't overwhelmingly salty and didn't hit us with overly sweet or acidic undertones.

Eat This, Not That! Verdict:

I really didn't expect to like this one as much as I did. Prego doesn't adorn its label with fancy lettering or mystifying [health food buzzwords](#). But it does have a simple, well-balanced flavor that makes it versatile enough to be paired with fatty cuts of meat, lean seafood, and light veggies alike. If Prego swapped canola oil for EVOO, we would totally be all over this.

Buy a 23-oz. jar now for \$11.82 at [Amazon](#).

4

THE SILVER PALATE LOW SODIUM MARINARA



Nutrition: Per 1/2 cup, 125 g: 70 calories, 3.5 g fat (0.5 g saturated fat), 115 mg sodium, 7 g carbs (2 g fiber, 5 g sugar), 2 g protein

Ingredients: Imported San Marzano Whole Peeled Tomatoes, California Whole Peeled And Crushed Tomatoes, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Fresh Onions, Fresh Carrots, Fresh Garlic, Pear Concentrate, Spices

Appearance & Consistency: Although the general consistency was light, albeit sporadic tomato lumps, this sauce was jam-packed with spices by the looks of it. Not to mention, the fresh carrots added some crunchiness that I can predict will work well in a slew of recipes.

Taste: Despite being the lowest in sodium of all our test panelists, The Silver Palate didn't disappoint our taste buds. Sure, it wasn't as umami-packed as some of the other picks, but it did boast unexpected fresh flavors (hello, pear!) and hearty spices.

Eat This, Not That! Verdict:

Just because this pick is lacking sodium, that doesn't mean it's not rife with flavor. Instead of relying on the heart-harming stuff, The Silver Palate's marinara takes advantage of quality ingredients, like Imported San Marzano tomatoes and EVOO, to lend the sauce its complexity. This surprisingly delicious sauce proves that you can keep the excess heart-harming salt off your fork without compromising flavor.

Buy 2 25-oz. jars now for \$32.12 at [Amazon](#).

3

365 EVERYDAY VALUE ORGANIC MARINARA



Nutrition: Per 1/2 cup, 118 g: 50 calories, 2 g fat (0 g saturated fat), 450 mg sodium, 7 g carbs (2 g fiber, 4 g sugar), 2 g protein

Ingredients: Organic Diced Tomatoes, Organic Tomato Puree, Organic Garlic Puree (Organic Garlic, Water), Organic Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Organic Onions, Salt, Organic Garlic, Organic Basil, Organic Oregano, Organic Black Pepper

Appearance & Consistency: All of the star ingredients—the garlic, onions, basil, and oregano—were eye-catchingly present in Whole Foods' organic marinara. Besides for an occasional diced tomato, the sauce was generally thin.

Taste: While my palate picked up on all of the individual spices and alliums, the flavors lacked harmonization. This noodle smotherer tasted like it needed more time on the stove top.

Eat This, Not That! Verdict:

This pick sort of reminded me of my own single attempt at marinara sauce, which involved my impatience inhibiting the spices to simmer long enough to actually marry. In other words, I expected Whole Foods to execute a better sauce than I ever have... but I can't deny that it was nonetheless tasty.

Buy a 25-oz. jar now for \$2.49 at [365 By Whole Foods](#).

2

THE MEATBALL SHOP CLASSIC TOMATO SAUCE



Nutrition: Per 1/2 cup, 113 g: 70 calories, 4 g fat (0.5 g saturated fat), 450 mg sodium, 6 g carbs (1 g fiber, 3 g sugar), 2 g protein

Ingredients: Imported Italian Whole Peeled Tomatoes, Fresh Onions, Olive Oil, Salt, Fresh Garlic, Oregano, Chili Flakes, Bay Leaves

Appearance & Consistency: Although it did have some oil separation, a quick stir lent the sauce the velvetiness we were wishing for. Given the fact that I spotted a few minced garlic cloves floating around, I expected this to taste a lot like the allium.

Taste: Imagine you had the time to simmer fresh tomatoes and smoky spices on the stovetop. What a fantastic visualization, right? Well, The Meatball Shop Classic Tomato Sauce will bless your plate of penne with homemade results sans kitchen time.

Eat This, Not That! Verdict:

If you're ever fortunate enough to walk into one of the swanky NYC-based locations of The Meatball Shop, you'll realize how this sauce smells just like it. The topper was tangy and umami-rich, but surprisingly, not spicy at all despite its inclusion of chili flakes. This sauce wasn't too robust or complex, rendering it perfect for meatballs (duh!) or ragù.

Buy 2 24-oz. jars now for \$16.00 (\$8.00 each) at [The Meatball Shop](#).

1

RAO'S HOMEMADE MARINARA



Nutrition: Per 1/2 cup, 113 g: 80 calories, 7 g fat (1 g saturated fat), 340 mg sodium, 4 g carbs (1 g fiber, 3 g sugar), 1 g protein

Ingredients: Italian Tomatoes, Olive Oil, Fresh Onions, Salt, Fresh Garlic, Fresh Basil, Black Pepper, Oregano

Appearance & Consistency: I can happily report that I didn't spot any ingredient chunks floating and the texture was consistent without being overly thick or runny. All the spices and veggies were visibly present and I couldn't help but notice the olive oil glistening gold in the light. A simply beautiful sauce.

Taste: If my taste buds could jump for joy, oh how they would. Rao's Homemade Marinara tasted just like meatballs.

Eat This, Not That! Verdict:

Italian grannies everywhere, meet your rival. This sauce held up to the bread well, is perfectly salted, and its sweet to tart ratio and robust umami flavor simply blew it out of the park. Although Rao's is filled with enough oil to glisten as noticeably as Edward Cullen in sunlight, the slow-simmered sauce uses heart-loving olive oil only. Since it is higher in healthy fats than many other offerings, this sauce would best complement lean meat, seafood, and even zoodles. Or just a plain old spoon. Yes, actually, I'm guilty of slurping up an entire serving of this stuff sans bread and all spoon. Sorry not sorry.

Buy a 24-oz. jar now for \$7.99 at [Amazon](#).

