

Growing Spaghetti Sauce – by Selinda Barkhuis

The recipe

- This is not so much a recipe as a quick-and-easy way to process the bounty of the fall garden into ready-to-use “spaghetti sauce cubes.”
- Sauté garlic, onions, mushrooms, and/or peppers in olive oil. If not ready to proceed, ladle into freezer containers for later use.
- For spaghetti sauce, add tomatoes, zucchini (tomatillos, egg-plant, and/or corn) and herbs and cook until desired tenderness.
- Ladle the sauce into quart-sized freezer containers (leave 1 inch of headspace) and freeze (but avoid freezing sauce that contains previously frozen ingredients). Vacuum-pack the resulting spaghetti sauce cubes to re-use the freezer containers for additional batches.
- To use, defrost a spaghetti sauce cube and, if desired, mix in some additional tomato sauce/paste and/or ground beef and heat up for serving with your favorite pasta. Don’t forget the parmesan cheese!
- This recipe is for FREEZING ONLY. DO NOT CAN this recipe.

Growing heat-loving plants on the Olympic Peninsula

- The Olympic Peninsula enjoys a temperate marine climate which makes for pleasant hiking, biking, and gardening all year round, but spaghetti sauce ingredients such as tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, and basil will do better with some protection from that natural marine push “air conditioner” that keeps us so pleasantly cool in summer.
- Start off by choosing short-season varieties (<70 days) when picking out seeds or starts. There simply is not enough summer heat or day-length on the Olympic Peninsula to grow long-season varieties.

Growing plants in self-watering totes

- Self-watering totes placed against a sunny southern wall, preferably under an overhang, are optimal for growing tomatoes, peppers, basil (and cucumbers) on the Olympic Peninsula.
- In the heat of summer, self-watering totes may need to be filled daily with water. No fertilizer beyond initial set-up is necessary.
- Beyond keeping totes filled with water, all attention can be focused on staking, pruning, and harvesting.
- (Re)using red plastic mulch on the self-watering totes improves productivity for tomatoes, and silver mulch improves productivity for peppers, and deters aphids, whiteflies, and cucumber beetles.
- If needed, a band of self-adhesive copper tape around the totes will deter even the most persistent slugs.
- For detailed instructions, see the “Make your own self-watering tomato planter” handout at www.barkhuis.com.

Growing plants in the garden

- For heat-loving plants grown in the garden, consider protecting them from the worst of the weather with a simple tunnel made from ¾ inch PVC and 6 mil. plastic from the hardware store.
- Push both ends of the PVC pipes into the soil several feet apart, screw a 1x4 cedar board along the upper end of the south side of the PVC pipes (optional), and attach the plastic to the PVC and cedar board with large office supply binder clips. Keep south side of tunnel open.
- To prevent plants from overheating during the hottest days of summer, increase ventilation by flipping up the plastic on the north side of the tunnel and/or flipping down the plastic on the sides.
- Straw (but NOT hay) is excellent mulch for garden bed crops, reducing the need for watering and providing a clean bed for fruit.
- If slugs are a problem, try using copper strips, beer traps, diatomaceous earth, or coffee grounds.



Tomatoes growing in self-watering totes



Peppers growing in a PVC & plastic tunnel



Young squash plants benefit from Hot Kaps



Multiplier onions can be replanted every fall

Garlic, onions, and shallots (alliums)

- Planting stock can be improved in size and quality by re-planting the best garlic, multiplier onion, and shallot cloves and bulbs every fall.
- Alliums inhibit the growth of beans so avoid inter-planting the two.
- Prepare planting bed with lots of organic matter. Prepare rows with whole fertilizer. After planting, add a layer of horse manure or straw.
- Fertilize again when growth starts in early spring, and water if spring is dry, but stop watering a week or so before harvest.
- Harvest garlic when there are still a number of green leaves.
- Garlic is one of those crops that should be rotated with at least 3 years between crops to minimize risk of disease.
- "Cure" freshly harvested alliums by placing entire plants on racks in dry and well-ventilated areas. Avoid exposure to rain and sun.
- Braid cured garlic or place cured alliums in mesh bags. Keep in dry, well ventilated area. Depending on variety, alliums store 3-12 months.
- For garlic bread to serve with spaghetti dinner, slice tops off garlic bulbs, place in dish, drizzle with olive oil, cover, and place in cold oven. Set at 350F and bake for 45 minutes. Cut bread length-wise and bake for last 15 minutes. Spread bread with garlic squeezed from bulbs.

Tomatoes

- A beautiful red tomato may look good, but may have disappointing flavor. Choose short-season varieties renowned for good flavor, such as Cosmonaut Volkov (heirloom) and Sungold (orange cherry).
- A self-watering tote can hold two tomato plants. Stake up plants and prune to maximize exposure of flowers and fruit to sun. Remove new growth later in the summer to focus plant's energy to maturing fruit.
- To quickly store raw tomatoes for adding to sauce later, freeze them whole, sliced, chopped, or puréed. No blanching needed.
- Do not add herbs before freezing; add herbs to the final sauce.

Peppers

- A self-watering tote can hold 4-6 pepper plants. Stake up starts to prevent heavy fruit-laden plants from tipping over.
- If grown in-ground (rather than in self-watering totes), prepare the soil with lots of organic matter high in N (such as well-composted manure), plant pepper plants about 12-18 inches apart (pepper plants like to "hold hands"), side-dress with whole fertilizer, and keep plants well-watered and fertilized with fish emulsion throughout the season.
- To quickly store an abundance of peppers, cut them up, vacuum pack, and freeze. No blanching needed.

Zucchini (and other squash)

- Squash is easy to start in a barely moist starting mixture in cow pots.
- Transplant at 3-4 weeks into garden beds with lots of organic matter.
- Protect young transplants from the weather and slugs with king-sized Hot Kaps. Cut an X at the top and make it bigger to guide the growing plants through. Leave the Hot Kaps to mulch around the plants.
- Water and fertilize squash plants well throughout the growing season, using both fish emulsion and kelp meal.
- Keep zucchini plants picked to promote additional fruiting.
- Choose a powdery mildew-resistant variety or start spraying plants with the biological fungicide Serenade (considered "organic") at the first sign of powdery mildew.
- To store an abundance of zucchini, cut up, vacuum pack, and freeze. Blanching for 3-4 minutes will improve zucchini's longevity in the freezer but also adds a lot of work – just plan on using un-blanching frozen zucchini for sauces & quick breads within the next few months.



Cure garlic in a dry, airy location



Zucchini needs a lot of water & fertilizer

Season your spaghetti sauce with basil, oregano, bay leaves, parsley, or thyme

Oregano, bay laurel, and parsley are easy to grow on the Olympic Peninsula. Basil likes it warm and light and needs regular water and fertilizer. Basil responds well to regular harvesting. Process an abundance of basil by blending leaves in a bit of olive oil, freezing the resulting sauce in ice cube trays, and storing the cubes in an airtight container in the freezer for later use.



Basil is easy to propagate. Buy an annual basil start, take cuttings, root them in water, plant one start per pot with drainage in good quality potting soil, and place in a warm and sunny location. Repeat the propagation process for a constant supply of basil.