

## Pork Ragu

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### WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

A meaty, long-cooked ragu requires the right cut of meat, and we found that baby back ribs fit the bill, providing tender meat and lots of flavor and body from the bones. Browning the ribs first creates flavorful fond, and a base of onion, carrot, and fennel lends traditional Italian flavor. Braising the meat in the oven in broth, tomatoes, and wine renders it fork-tender, and cooking a whole head of garlic along with the meat requires less work than chopping a dozen cloves. We return the shredded meat to the savory cooking liquid along with the sweet, mellow garlic before tossing it all with pasta and topping it with Parmesan cheese.

### MAKES ABOUT 8 CUPS

This recipe makes enough sauce to coat 2 pounds of pasta. Leftover sauce may be refrigerated for up to three days or frozen for up to one month.

### INGREDIENTS

- 2** (2 1/4- to 2 1/2-pound) racks baby back ribs, trimmed and each rack cut into fourths
- 2** teaspoons ground fennel
- Kosher salt and pepper
- 3** tablespoons olive oil
- 1** large onion, chopped fine
- 1** large fennel bulb, stalks discarded, bulb halved, cored, and chopped fine
- 2** large carrots, peeled and chopped fine
- 1/4** cup minced fresh sage
- 1 1/2** teaspoons minced fresh rosemary
- 1** cup plus 2 tablespoons dry red wine
- 1** (28-ounce) can whole peeled tomatoes, drained and crushed coarse
- 3** cups chicken broth
- 1** garlic head, outer papery skins removed and top fourth of head cut off and discarded
- 1** pound pappardelle or tagliatelle
- Grated parmesan cheese

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Sprinkle ribs with ground fennel and generously season with salt and pepper, pressing spices to adhere. Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add half of ribs, meat side down, and cook, without moving them, until meat is well browned, 6 to 8 minutes; transfer to plate. Repeat with remaining ribs; set aside.

2. Reduce heat to medium and add onion, fennel, carrots, 2 tablespoons sage, rosemary, and 1/2 teaspoon salt to now-empty pot. Cook, stirring occasionally and scraping up any browned bits, until vegetables are well browned and beginning to stick to pot bottom 12 to 15 minutes.
3. Add 1 cup wine and cook until evaporated, about 5 minutes. Stir in tomatoes and broth and bring to simmer. Submerge garlic and ribs, meat side down, in liquid; add any accumulated juices from plate. Cover and transfer to oven. Cook until ribs are fork-tender, about 2 hours.
4. Remove pot from oven and transfer ribs and garlic to rimmed baking sheet. Using large spoon, skim any fat from surface of sauce. Once cool enough to handle, shred meat from bones; discard bones and gristle. Return meat to pot. Squeeze garlic from its skin into pot. Stir in remaining 2 tablespoons sage and remaining 2 tablespoons wine. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
5. Meanwhile, bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add pasta and 2 tablespoons salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve 1/2 cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return it to pot. Add half of sauce and toss to combine, adjusting consistency with reserved cooking water as needed. Serve, passing Parmesan separately.

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#### TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE: MAKING RAGU FROM BABY BACK RIBS

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Baby back ribs are an unusual choice for ragu. But they make perfect culinary sense for this dish, as these ribs have great meaty flavor, contain lots of bone to contribute body to the sauce, and cook relatively quickly (compared with other bony cuts like shanks). We cut two racks into three-rib segments, brown them, then braise them in flavorful liquid. Two hours later, we remove the meat, shred it, and add it back to the sauce.

