

## Spaghetti with Swordfish in Tomato Sauce with Fennel

This proves that there is elegance in simplicity, and that a tomato sauce can be luxurious. One of the most welcome features of this recipe is that the fish and sauce are cooked together in the oven and require no last-minute attention, allowing you to fully concentrate on cooking the spaghetti. An extravagant amount of fish goes into this dish, so you may well want to serve it as a main course instead of as an Italian-style first course. As an entrée, it serves four generously. Follow it with a salad or vegetables dressed with lemon juice and your best extra-virgin olive oil. As a first course, you'll get six servings from it, even eight. In that case, precede the spaghetti with an antipasto and follow it with grilled or sautéed fish, plus vegetables or a salad.

2 pounds swordfish slices cut about 1/2 inch thick  
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil  
2 large cloves garlic, finely minced  
1 loosely packed cup finely cut parsley (see note)  
2 teaspoons fennel seed  
1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes (or 1/2 dried hot red pepper)  
1 28-ounce can crushed Italian plum tomatoes  
Salt (about 1/2 teaspoon)  
1 pound spaghetti

Cut the skin off the swordfish, then cut the fish into neat cubes. Place in one layer in a 9 by 13-inch baking dish (or one with equivalent interior surface). (Cover with plastic and refrigerate until 15 minutes before serving time, if preparing ahead.)

In a medium saucepan, combine the oil and garlic and place over low heat. When the garlic begins to sizzle, but not color, add the parsley, the fennel seed, and the hot red pepper. Raise the heat slightly and continue to cook for 4 minutes, stirring constantly.

Add the crushed tomatoes, stir well, and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Season with salt to taste, then simmer gently for 5 minutes, stirring a couple of times. (May be prepared ahead. If refrigerating, reheat to warm before proceeding.)

Bring a large pot of water to the boil for the spaghetti.

Pour the warm sauce over the swordfish and place in a preheated 400-degree oven. Bake for 20 minutes, until the sauce is bubbling gently around the edges and the fish is cooked.

After the sauce has cooked in the oven for about 10 minutes, add salt to the boiling water and boil the spaghetti until done to taste.

When both the sauce and the spaghetti are cooked, drain the spaghetti, then return it to the pot in which it was boiled. Pour over about two thirds of the sauce and toss well. Turn the dressed spaghetti into a warmed serving bowl, then top with the remaining sauce.

Serve immediately.

Note: Parsley is a flavor in Southern Italian cooking, not just a color note and garnish. The more you cut parsley, the less flavor it has. So when I call for "finely cut parsley" in a recipe, I do not mean finely chopped, as you would to sprinkle on top of a dish. The method is to gather the parsley under your hand and cut it with a sharp knife as finely as possible. Draw the knife through the parsley only once. Alternately, snip the parsley with scissors.

Recipe by Arthur Schwartz