



# Spicy Sausage Ragu with Red Peppers

Makes 12 cups    **Cooking Time** 9 to 11 hours on Low or 5 to 7 hours on High

**✓ WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:** Spicy Italian sausages and sweet bell peppers are a classic pairing that we thought would translate perfectly into a bright, slightly sweet, and deeply flavored slow-cooker pasta sauce. We liked the flavorful heat that hot Italian sausages imparted, and a few minutes spent browning them and breaking them up in a skillet gave the sauce an even deeper and richer flavor. Since we had our skillet out, we sautéed our aromatics (onions, garlic, oregano, and red pepper flakes) and deglazed the pan with red wine. Tomato paste, crushed tomatoes, diced tomatoes, and tomato sauce were the perfect combination of tomato products with which to build our sauce—neither too watery nor too thick. As for the bell peppers, which rounded out the flavors and cut a little of the heat, we simply softened them in the microwave and stirred them into the sauce just before serving. This recipe makes enough to sauce 3 pounds of pasta.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 pounds hot Italian sausage, removed from its casing
- 2 onions, minced
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh oregano or 2 teaspoons dried
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 cup dry red wine
- 1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- 1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained
- 1 (28-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 2 red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and cut into ½-inch pieces (see page 91)
- ½ cup minced fresh parsley
- Salt and pepper

1. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add sausage and brown well, breaking up large pieces with wooden spoon, about 5 minutes; transfer to slow cooker. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons fat left in skillet.
2. Add onions, garlic, tomato paste, oregano, and red pepper flakes to fat in skillet and cook over medium-high heat until onions are softened and lightly browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Stir in wine, scraping up any browned bits, and simmer until thickened, about 5 minutes; transfer to slow cooker.
3. Stir crushed tomatoes, diced tomatoes, and tomato sauce into slow cooker. Cover and cook until sauce is deeply flavored, 9 to 11 hours on low or 5 to 7 hours on high.
4. Let sauce settle for 5 minutes, then remove fat from surface using large spoon. Microwave bell peppers with remaining tablespoon oil in bowl, stirring occasionally, until tender, about 5 minutes. Stir softened bell peppers into sauce and let sit until heated through, about 5 minutes. Before serving, stir in parsley and season with salt and pepper to taste.

## ON THE SIDE SOFT AND CHEESY BREAD STICKS

Roll out 2 (1-pound) balls pizza dough separately on lightly floured counter into two 12 by 6-inch rectangles. Cut each rectangle crosswise into twelve 1-inch-wide strips and lay on well-oiled rimmed baking sheet (dough strips will touch each other). Brush breadsticks with 3 tablespoons olive oil, sprinkle with ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Bake in 400-degree oven until golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking. Pull bread sticks apart and serve. Makes 24.