

# Cleo Coyle's Fresh Garden Tomato Sauce

Text and photos © by Alice Alfonsi,  
who writes [The Coffeehouse Mysteries](#)  
as [Cleo Coyle](#) in collaboration with her  
husband, Marc Cerasini

*During the Great Depression, my father's father kept his large family fed by working a small farm from which they sold produce. Every spring, my dad helped his father plant 2,000 tomato plants for their family. Years later, when my dad had a family of his own, he continued that tradition, raising more than 100 tomato plants in back of our suburban home every summer, without fail. Fresh garden tomato sauce was always part of that yield. If you've never made your own tomato sauce, you are missing one of life's most satisfying culinary pleasures. It's a wonderful project for families with kids, couples, or any curious cook who's never had the experience. Below is the recipe I now make. The amazing smell of the sauce cooking brings me right back to my childhood and my beloved dad. May you cook it with love and make lifelong memories of your own.*

*~ Cleo Coyle (aka Alice Alfonsi)  
author of [The Coffeehouse Mysteries](#)*

**Makes about 1 to 1-1/2 quarts of sauce**  
(depending on your thickness preference)

## INGREDIENTS:

**8 pounds ripe tomatoes** (\*any kind)

**1-2 onions** (I use red onions, but any kind will do)

**4 cloves garlic**

**5 tablespoons butter** (the secret ingredient for a smooth, sweet sauce)

**\*Tomato note:** While Roma (aka Italian plum) tomatoes are traditionally used for sauce, you can use practically any tomato for this recipe or even mix the varieties. Just make sure they're nice and ripe (not rotten but ripe) and use your nose. The more they smell like fresh, earthy garden tomatoes, the better your sauce will taste.



*My late father, Tony Alfonsi, with his mother, Grazia. Dad served in the Army Air Corps and worked in a Pittsburgh area steel mill. Garden tomatoes helped his family survive the Great Depression.*

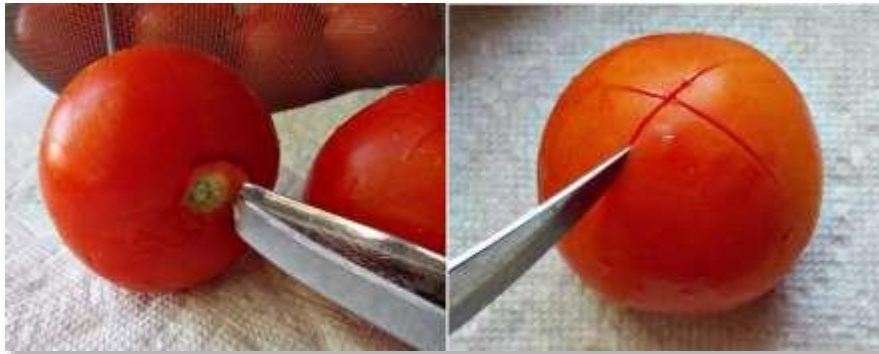
## Prep Tomatoes for Cooking

Peeling and de-seeding tomatoes will remove bitterness and unwanted textures from your sauce, bringing it to a higher level of taste, so it's worth the trouble. It's easy to do and once learned can be used in a lifetime of cooking.

[Click here](#) to watch a chef from the Culinary Institute of America show you how to perform this simple process. Or follow the steps shown below...



**1 - Peel tomatoes to improve sauce texture:** Remove stems and shallowly core as shown in my photo. Slice a small X at the bottom of each tomato.



Place a few tomatoes at a time into a pot of simmering (or boiling) water. After 30 seconds (for small tomatoes) or 1 minute (for larger), remove immediately and drop in a bowl of very cold water to stop the cooking.



Using your fingers, gently peel the skin off the tomatoes. If you have any trouble with peeling a tomato, simply place it back in the boiling water for another 15 seconds or so and repeat the process. (Just be careful not to cook the tomatoes too much or you'll end up with a hand of mush.)

**TIP: You can save the skins to make a delicious condiment "sun-dried tomato flakes"—see the recipe at end of this one.**





**2 – De-seed tomatoes to cut bitterness:** Cut the peeled tomatoes in half. Make sure you cut it as shown, crosswise, along its equator. Using a small spoon, gently dig out the seeds and discard. You won't get every seed out, and that's okay. Get as many as you can, and you'll improve the sauce flavor.



**3 – Hand-squash your tomatoes:** This is the fun part (kids love it). Place a large pot on the stove. Using clean hands, roughly crush each peeled and seeded tomato over the pot and toss inside.

**4 – Cook your tomatoes:** Cook down the tomatoes over medium-high heat for about 30 or so minutes. To prevent scorching, stir the sauce every so often. Use a large spoon; and, as you stir, smash the tomatoes, crushing them up as they cook.



**5 - Easy add-ins (onions and garlic):**

To preserve the fresh garden flavor of this sauce, I do not use spices. I simply add 2 roughly chopped medium onions and 4 cloves of smashed garlic.

***Note:** I roughly chop the onions and garlic at this stage because, at the end of the cooking process, I use a hand blender to smooth any remaining big chunks. If you prefer, you can do the work now, and finely chop these veggies or put them through the food processor. Then they will cook into the sauce, mostly dissolving by the end.*



After you stir in the onion and garlic...



**6 - Add the butter (the secret ingredient):**

As the butter cooks into the sauce, it cuts some of the acid in the tomatoes, leaving you with a sweet, smooth, bright-tasting tomato sauce that is out of this world.

Continue cooking the sauce down for another 20 to 30 minutes. You are watching for the excess liquid to evaporate, the onions to wilt and begin to dissolve and the sauce to thicken up...



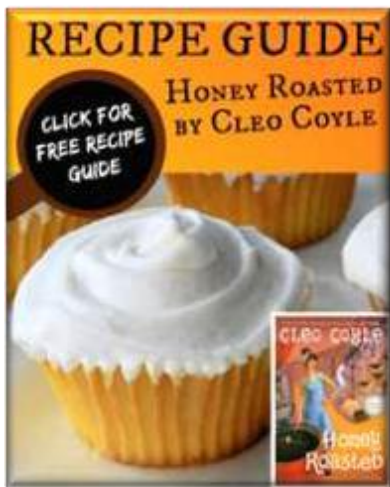




**7 - Buzz with a hand blender:** To finish, use an immersion (hand) blender to smooth out any remaining chunks before serving. If you don't have a hand blender, you can use a food processor, food mill, or standing blender.

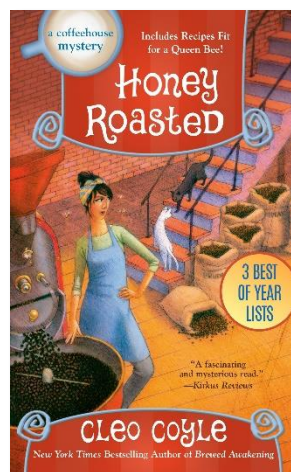
**8- Too thick? Add water, stock, or wine:** If you happen to boil the sauce down too far, and it's too thick for your taste, you can correct it by adding water or a little vegetable (or beef) stock, or even wine. Continue cooking the sauce until you get the consistency (thinness or thickness) that you prefer.

**Storing:** This sauce will stay fresh about 1 week in the refrigerator or up to 6 months in the freezer.

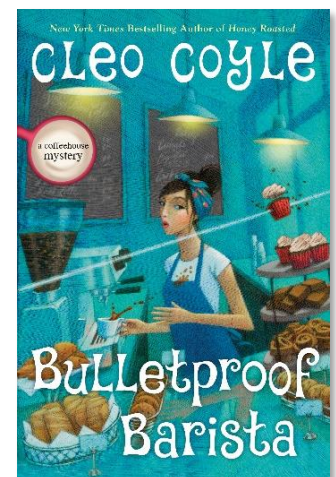


For the Recipe Guide to Cleo's new culinary mystery: **Honey Roasted**, [click here](#).

*Eat with joy! ~ Cleo*



The [Coffeehouse Mysteries](#) are bestselling culinary mysteries, set in a landmark Greenwich Village coffeehouse. Each includes the added bonus of recipes. To learn more and see more recipes, visit Cleo Coyle's online coffeehouse at [www.CoffeehouseMystery.com](http://www.CoffeehouseMystery.com) And her recipe blog at [www.CleoCoyleRecipes.com](http://www.CleoCoyleRecipes.com)



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# Cleo Coyle's “Sun-dried” Tomato Flakes

## *How to use leftover tomato skins*

Recipe text and photos (c) by Alice Alfonsi, who writes [The Coffeehouse Mysteries](#) as [Cleo Coyle](#) with her husband Marc Cerasini



*Sun-dried tomatoes bring great flavor to so many dishes. That bright, tangy taste is concentrated beautifully in these easy-to-make tomato flakes. You can toss the flakes onto sandwiches and wraps, stir them into soups, stews, and veggie dips; add a few tablespoons to a meatloaf (in place of tomato paste); or flavor boost your salads, pastas, burgers, omelets, and pizza. Best of all, it's a great use for tomato skins and peels that you might otherwise discard. The easy instructions are below. So waste not and... Eat with joy! ~ Cleo*

**Step 1:** Start with the tomato peels (or skins) that you have left over from cooking sauce from scratch or other uses. (For instructions on how to easily remove tomato skins, see page 2.) Place parchment paper on a half-sheet pan and brush the paper with olive oil. Spread out the tomato peels in a single layer.

**Step 2:** Bake in an oven preheated to 225 degrees. F. After 30 minutes flip the peels over. Bake for another 20 to 30 minutes for a total cooking time of about 1 hour. The peels are done when they turn crisp like potato chips—but you don't want them to turn dark brown so check them near the end of the cooking time.

**Step 3:** When they're done dehydrating in the oven, place the dried peels in a food processor, blender, or spice grinder (a coffee grinder with a blade) and run the machine in short bursts or pulses until they form flakes. (Do not over-process.) Store the tomato flakes in a sealed plastic bag or airtight container. For longer life (about 2 months), I keep mine in the refrigerator.



*Eat with Joy!*  
~ Cleo Coyle, author of  
[The Coffeehouse Mysteries](#)

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