

Vegetarian Cauliflower Bolognese Rigatoni

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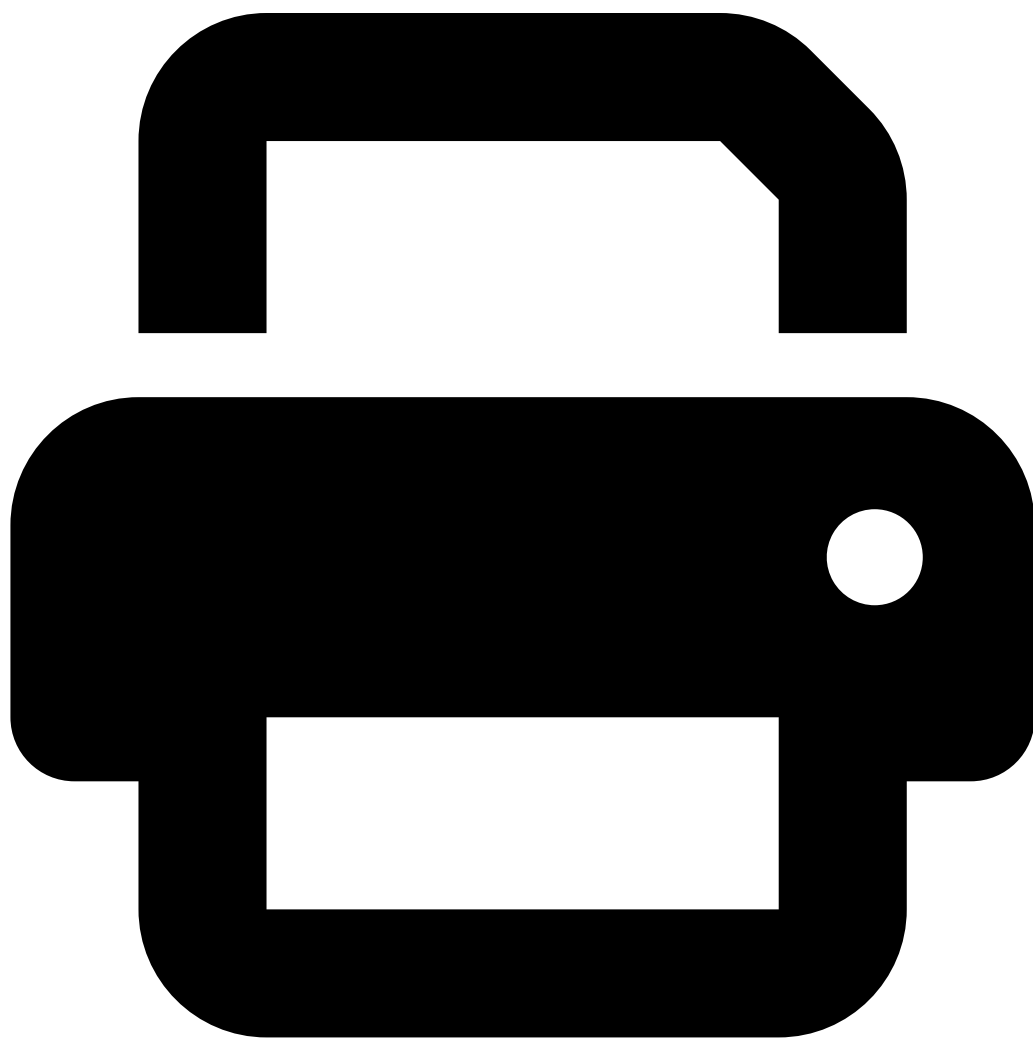
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This easy and delicious vegetarian Bolognese rigatoni features cauliflower as the star ingredient. Inspired by my love of cauliflower—and my dislike of food waste—I created this recipe when I had a head of cauliflower in the fridge that needed to be used. I wanted to incorporate it into a pasta sauce, so I took the classic meat-based Bolognese and replaced the beef with finely chopped cauliflower.

Traditional Bolognese is a hearty, chunky sauce made with ground beef, garlic, herbs, and just enough tomatoes to bring it all together. While my family adores pasta, they're not exactly cauliflower fans. But let me tell you—they absolutely loved this dish. Cooking cauliflower in Bolognese style creates a rich, flavorful meatless sauce that's hearty, satisfying, and sure to win over even the pickiest eaters.

It's not often you find a recipe the whole family loves—but when you do, it's a win-win. Not only is this dish a family

favorite, it's also a budget-friendly crowd-pleaser. Just add a fresh salad and some crusty Italian bread, and you've got a dinner that's special enough for weekend get-togethers and simple enough for busy weeknights.

This hearty vegetarian sauce is one of my go-to recipes when I want something easy, healthy, and full of flavor—the trifecta of Italian dinner success. I always make it in my cast iron Dutch oven, where the flavors simmer to perfection.

Sometimes, if I want hands free cooking, I start it on the stove top, and finish it off in a 375 degree oven for one hour. anyway you serve it it serves up delicious. You can double or triple the recipe, it keeps in your refrigerator up to 4 days, or you can freeze it up to 3 months for ready made meals.

If you like vegetarian recipes that are easy to make and taste delicious try my Italian vegetarian minestrone soup or my vegetarian orzo with asparagus and peas.



- 1 pound rigatoni
- 1 head cauliflower, cut into small florets
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 2 carrots, diced
- 1 cup diced celery

- 1 tbsp minced garlic
- 2 (15-ounce) cans crushed tomatoes
- 2 cups reserved pasta water
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh Italian parsley
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh basil
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh thyme
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the rigatoni according to the package directions until al dente. Before draining, reserve **2 cups of the pasta cooking water**, then drain the pasta and set aside.
2. Meanwhile, heat the olive oil and butter in a large, deep skillet or Dutch oven over medium-high heat.
3. Add the onion, carrots, celery, and garlic. Sauté for **5–7 minutes**, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are softened and the onion is translucent.
4. Stir in the cauliflower florets and cook for **8–10 minutes**, stirring frequently and breaking the florets into smaller pieces with a wooden spoon as they soften. Continue cooking until the cauliflower is lightly browned and resembles a hearty, meat-like texture.
5. Season with salt and black pepper. Add the crushed tomatoes, reserved pasta water, parsley, basil, and thyme. Stir to combine.
6. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for **30 minutes**, stirring occasionally, until the cauliflower is tender and the sauce has thickened.
7. Stir in the grated Parmesan cheese until melted and incorporated.
8. Add the cooked rigatoni to the sauce and toss until

evenly coated. If needed, add a splash of reserved pasta water to loosen the sauce.

9. Serve immediately, topped with additional Parmesan cheese, fresh parsley, and freshly cracked black pepper.
10. Cut the cauliflower into very small florets so they naturally break down into a rich, "meaty" texture as they cook.

For a vegan version, replace the butter with additional olive oil and substitute the Parmesan with your favorite dairy-free alternative.

Leftovers keep well in the refrigerator for up to 4 days and taste even better the next day.