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# Food Gal

CAROLYN JUNG  
Musings on food, wine, laughter and life

## Lamb and Butternut Squash Ragu with Mint, Orange, and The Greatest Tomatoes From Europe

Posted on [January 6, 2020](#) by [foodgal](#) [Leave a comment](#)



Whole canned cherry tomatoes in their juices from Europe make this pasta dish even more of a treat.

Ancient landmarks, breathtaking artworks, artisan foodstuffs perfected over generations, and the intricate fashions crafted by Prada, Dior and Givenchy.

Those are some of the things I most love about Europe.

Now, comes the newest addition to my list: canned tomatoes.

Yes, really.

I never thought I'd get that excited over such a basic pantry staple until the Italian Association of Canned Vegetable Industries and European Union founded the marketing program, [The Greatest Tomatoes From Europe](#), to spread the word far and wide about its canned tomatoes. As part of the program, they began sending out free samples to food writers like myself to give them a try.

I received two cans, 400g each, of [Davio Gragnano](#) whole, peeled long, oblong and cherry tomatoes, vacuum-sealed with their juices. When you open the cans, what's most striking is that the plump tomatoes are afloat in a fairly thick puree of a sauce, not the weak, watery liquid usually found inside most supermarket canned tomatoes. I dipped a spoon in to taste a very vivid tomato flavor. While you might strain out and discard the liquid in other cans, it would be a waste to that here because it was actually a bonus — getting tomatoes and sauce in one.



Samples from the Greatest Tomatoes From Europe.

Inside my sample box were also packages of [Pastificio G. Di Martino](#) Italian dried pasta. So there was no question that I'd be making a bountiful pasta dish out of it all. Of course, not that I ever need an excuse to make pasta.

With some leftover harissa from another recipe, I decided to make a lamb ragu. To add a little sweetness and make the dish even heartier in this chilly weather, I also added chopped butternut squash. And because lamb — and Moroccan flavors — marry so well with orange and mint, I added in those two ingredients, as well.

The two cans of European tomatoes and their juices brought everything together. Because the juices already had so much body, and the butternut squash gave off some of its starch as it simmered, I was left with a thick, velvety sauce without needing any tomato paste.



Just the ticket on a winter night.

I even left the tomatoes whole. Some of them broke down a bit during the simmering, but quite a few of the cherry tomatoes remained whole for added texture and a surprise burst of intense tomato flavor whenever you bit into one.

Meaty, chunky, sweet, citrusy, minty, and just spicy enough, this is a pasta dish that will warm you through and through.

Of course, you could make it with any canned tomatoes. But for a real treat, the next time you go grocery shopping, keep your eyes peeled for any of [these brands](#) that make up the Greatest Tomatoes From Europe.

It may just open up your eyes — and palate — to what canned tomatoes can be.



A perfect dish when your pasta craving hits.

### Lamb and Butternut Squash Ragu with Mint, Orange and The Greatest Tomatoes From Europe

(Serves 4)

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

1 yellow onion, diced

1 pound ground lamb

1 tablespoon harissa

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Salt and pepper, to taste

1 cup red wine

1/3 cup fresh squeezed orange juice

1 (400 g) can cherry tomatoes and their juices

1 (400 g) can oblong tomatoes and their juices

Half of a small butternut squash, peeled, seeded and diced (about 1 1/2 pounds)

1 pound dried elicoidali or rigatoni

Handful of torn fresh mint leaves

Zest of 1/2 orange

Extra-virgin olive oil, for finishing

Grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, for serving

In a large saucepan or Dutch oven, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium-high heat. Saute onion until tender and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add lamb, and saute until cooked through, about 7 minutes, using a wooden spoon to break up the meat. Turn heat down to medium, and stir in harissa, cinnamon, and salt and pepper, and let toast for a few seconds. Pour in red wine and orange juice. Bring to a boil, then turn down to a simmer and let cook for 5 minutes.

Pour in both cans of tomatoes and their juices. On medium heat, simmer for 10 minutes. Stir in butternut squash, and let cook for about 30 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. The sauce will start to thicken.

In a large pot of salted water over high heat, cook pasta until al dente, according to manufacturer's directions. Reserve 1/2 cup of the pasta water; drain pasta.

Stir mint and orange zest into the pasta sauce. Add hot pasta, and toss to combine, adding some of the reserved pasta water if needed to ensure the sauce clings to the noodles. Portion pasta into shallow bowls. Drizzle with a little extra-virgin olive oil and grated Parmigiano before serving.

— From Carolyn Jung

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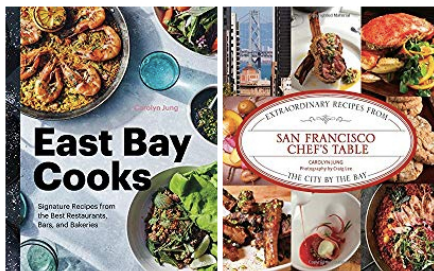
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