

ARRABBIATA

A bold combination of **tomato and chilli** characterises fiery arrabbiata sauce, which is perfect for making a piquant pasta meal. Here’s our list of what’s hot, and what’s not

The spicy kick offered up by this sauce makes perfect sense when you learn that ‘arrabbiata’ literally translates as ‘angry’. The heat comes from red chilli peppers or pepper flakes in the sauce – a perfect partner for the other main ingredient, tomato. Arrabbiata comes from Lazio, and it’s prolific on menus in Rome, though it is now a firm favourite in restaurants across Italy and beyond. It is usually combined with penne pasta to make *penne all’arrabbiata*, as the ridges of penne tubes hold the sauce beautifully. Serve with a sprinkling of Parmesan, a handful of Mediterranean vegetables, or if you’re feeling bold, add some spicy sausage, keeping a glass of water on hand to extinguish the flames!

Arrabbiata is an easy sauce to make yourself, and you’ll have no trouble finding a good recipe in a book or online. Making it yourself also allows you to temper the ingredients to your own taste, making it as hot or as tomatoey as suits your palate. But for days when there’s just too little time or energy for cooking, a shop-bought arrabbiata will do nicely, and to help you find a spicy little number to suit you, *Italia!* put seven ready-made arrabbiata sauces to the test...

SEGGIANO SUGO ALL'ARRABBIATA
From For stockists see www.seggiano.co.uk
Price £3.25/220g

This arrabbiata was created by the DeCarlo family in Puglia, and luckily for us Seggiano has now introduced it into the UK market (it’s part of the company’s new range of pasta sauces) which means we can share in the taste of its home-grown ingredients.

As this introduction suggests – not to mention the fact that it is sitting in our ‘Editor’s Choice’ box – this sauce went down extremely well with the entire panel of judges. Its texture is thick and lustrous enough to coat the pasta perfectly, and the taste is strong and bold, while still conveying nuanced layers and exhibiting a good depth of flavour. Notes of fresh tomato come to the fore while the heat from the chilli builds gradually but distinctly in the mouth to reach a zingy crescendo.

Every member of this month’s tasting panel independently gave this sauce a firm ‘thumbs up’ (their mouths too full to comment verbally at the time). All in all, “a very pleasing mixture of flavours”, as one taster put it (when he had finally finished munching).

VERDICT ★★★★★

An outstanding example of a good arrabbiata – fiery, fresh and intense... and universally popular with the panel.

CARLUCCIO’S SALSA ARRABBIATA
From Carluccio’s www.carluccios.com
Price £3.60/200g

A really ripe – almost sun-dried – tomato taste greets the taste buds on sampling this sauce. As a result it showcases a great initial richness, which is backed up by a pleasing vibrant colour and a lovely thick texture. Carluccio’s sauce is, however, once you get past the deliciously strong tomato taste, a remarkably mild arrabbiata, offering up a hint of chilli but lacking the definitive spicy kick that the judges were looking for. It’s certainly pleasant, but it’s just not a true representation of its name. It would make a good choice for those who prefer their arrabbiata sauce mildly annoyed rather than in a positive rage.

VERDICT ★★★

Although the sauce tastes good, it just isn’t chilli-laden enough to be classed as a true, ‘angry’ arrabbiata sauce.

HARVEY NICHOLS’ SUGO ALL'ARRABBIATA
From Harvey Nichols www.harveynichols.com
Price £3.95/270g

Although on first sight the texture of this sauce was deemed thin and watery by a couple of the judges, it actually came up trumps when tasted. Harvey Nichols’ arrabbiata boasts an impressive balance and depth of flavour and it exhibited distinct tomato and chilli tastes, with an underlying hint of herbs to add an additional facet of interest. Along with its stylish black and white packaging, its performance on tasting secured this sauce a reputation as a classy and tasty option.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This sauce was a “good all-rounder” with just the right amount of chilli to balance the fresh tomato taste.

JUST SO ITALIAN SUGO ALL'ARRABBIATA
From Just so Italian www.justsoitalian.co.uk
Price £3.50/280g

The best arrabbiata sauces convey a real fire from the chilli without compromising on the flavours of the sauce’s other ingredients and this contender, from the Abruzzo region, really manages to walk that delicate line. *Italia!’s* judges found Just so Italian’s arrabbiata sauce light in texture, but spicy and rich in taste. Although the aftertaste doesn’t linger for very long, the flavour is strong enough to satisfy and to offer up a distinctive – and eminently enjoyable – character. Ultimately, this sauce packs a very pleasing punch.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A good choice of arrabbiata, offering a good chilli content and widely popular with the judging panel.

O&F SUGO ALL'ARRABBIATA
From Olio e Farina www.olioefarina.com
Price £2.99/180g

Packaged in a neat little pot, Olio e Farina’s arrabbiata sauce performed pretty well in the taste stakes. It’s got a good ‘front of mouth’ chilli kick, which offered up a bold and promising first impression. However, it failed to follow this up with a strong, fresh tomato taste, which the tasting panel were hoping for. Ultimately, this sauce is a flavoursome and bold option, but its distinct chilli tingle perhaps serves to mask an underlying blandness – it’s certainly packing heat, but more layers of flavour would be make it even better.

VERDICT ★★★

This contender showed great promise, but lacked the depth of flavour that the judges were seeking.

SAINSBURY’S ARRABBIATA PASTA SAUCE
From Sainsbury’s www.sainsburys.co.uk
Price £1.35/340g

You get great value from Sainsbury’s arrabbiata sauce, but does it deliver taste-wise? Well, unfortunately it didn’t perform brilliantly in this month’s *Italia!* taste test. The basic problem was that the panel found it too bland to represent a truly satisfying arrabbiata sauce – both its taste and texture were too reminiscent merely of plain chopped tomatoes to excite. The thin taste and texture demonstrated by this sauce sadly let it down, and although it was by no means unpleasant it just didn’t exude nearly enough chilli – or any exciting arrabbiata character – to garner a better reaction.

VERDICT ★★

The absence of chilli kick and a weedy texture let down Sainsbury’s arrabbiata among the other contenders.

WAITROSE ARRABBIATA
From Waitrose www.waitrose.com
Price £2.49/340g

First impressions of this sauce were that it was pretty weak and watery in its texture. The judges hoped that it might perform better on tasting, but when it came to the taste test the Waitrose sauce failed to impress. Although it has delicate overtones of herbs to recommend it, the sauce was – in general – simply tomatoey, with not very much more flavour behind it, and little discernible chilli to lend it power or true arrabbiata status. Compared to some of the other sauces in this month’s test, which exhibited real fire and interest, this one was somewhat lacklustre.

VERDICT ★★

A rare poor performance for Waitrose in *Italia!’s* taste test – this sauce simply needed more chilli.