

Southern Tomato Gravy

Serves 4-6 | 20 minutes prep + 30 minutes cook time

Southern tomato gravy has its roots in Appalachia, where the cold winters require produce to be put up when it's ready. Summer tomatoes in the garden mean canned tomatoes for the winter pantry. Ronni Lundy, one of the founders of the Southern Foodways Alliance and part of the hillbilly diaspora, says that "tomato gravy is a quick winter fix intended to remind you of the sharp tang of the summer garden."

But you don't have to wait for cold weather to make tomato gravy. Fresh, ripe tomatoes make for tasty gravy, too. Just don't confuse this with the meaty, long-cooked tomato sauce that some Italian-Americans call gravy. Southern tomato gravy, like most traditional gravies, gets thickened with flour. The ragu dubbed gravy by early immigrants gains viscosity during the hours-long simmer.

Historically made with the flour-thickened drippings from cooked meat, gravy offers some extra flavor from a handful of pantry ingredients. In Appalachia tomato gravy usually started with a dollop of bacon grease from a can on the back of the stove. It made simple foods like cornbread or biscuits taste better. Our version gets even more flavor with the non-traditional addition of celery and jalapeño.

2 slices bacon, chopped*

½ onion, chopped

2 cloves garlic, chopped

1 stalk celery, finely chopped

**1 jalapeño, finely chopped
(remove the seeds and white
membrane for less chile heat)**

2 tablespoons flour

**3-4 medium tomatoes, chopped
or grated***

Pinch sugar

**Sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper to taste**

Step 1 Cook the bacon in a bit of olive oil until lightly browned. Add the onion, celery, and pepper with a good pinch of salt and cook until soft, about 5 minutes.

Step 2 Add the flour and cook for about 2 minutes, then add the tomatoes and sugar.

Step 3 Reduce the heat and simmer for about 15 minutes or until the gravy gets thick. Taste and add more salt and black pepper as desired.

*you can use just bacon fat or olive oil; substitute about 2 cups of canned, crushed tomatoes