

Classic Lasagne with Meatballs, Sausage, and Ricotta

Source: Beef for All Season's

Serves 4 to 6

In Italy, this particular style of lasagne is called vinci grassi. Some people prefer a less chunky meat sauce with their lasagne, and if you prefer, you are welcome to substitute your favorite homemade spaghetti sauce for the meatballs and tomato sauce used here. Either way, you can't lose! The white sauce in this recipe is called besciamella in Italy, which, as the name suggests, is the equivalent of the classic French béchamel sauce. Serve this dish with crusty garlic bread.

1 tablespoon olive oil
8 ounces spicy Italian Sausage

For the Meatballs:

1 pound lean high-quality ground beef
1 garlic clove, minced
1/2 cup minced onion
1/4 cup seasoned bread crumbs
2 egg yolks
1 tablespoon minced parsley
1 tablespoon minced oregano
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 tablespoon olive oil

For the Tomato Sauce

1 tablespoon olive oil
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 onion, diced
3 1/2 cups crushed canned tomatoes (28-ounce can), with liquid
1/2 cup tomato paste
1/4 cup red wine
1/2 teaspoon honey, or sugar
1 tablespoon minced oregano
2 teaspoons dried mixed herbs, such as Herbes de Provence
2 bay leaves

For the White Sauce:

3 cups milk
1 bay leaf
4 cloves
2 large pearl onions or boiling onions, peeled
3 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons sifted all-purpose flour
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
Pinch of nutmeg

For the Lasagne

8 ounces dried lasagne noodles
1 pound ricotta cheese
1 1/2 cups freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a nonstick sauté pan. Prick the sausages all over with a fork and sauté over medium heat until brown on all sides, about 5 or 6 minutes. Remove and drain on paper towels; when cool enough, cut into slices, chop, and set aside.

In a mixing bowl, combine the ground beef, garlic, onion, bread crumbs, egg yolks, parsley, and oregano. Season with salt and pepper and form into small meatballs, about the size of large olives; there should be about 30 meatballs. Heat the tablespoon of olive oil in the same sauté pan and cook the meatballs over medium-high heat until browned on all sides, about 5 or 6 minutes. Remove, drain on paper towels, and set aside. When cool, cut the meatballs in half.

To prepare the tomato sauce, heat the olive oil in a saucepan, add the garlic and onion, and sauté over medium-high heat for 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes, tomato paste, wine, honey, oregano, dried herbs, and bay leaves, stir well, and bring to a boil. Season with salt and pepper, add the sausage and meatballs, reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, for 20 minutes. Remove the bay leaves.

Meanwhile, prepare the white sauce. Place the milk and bay leaf in a small saucepan. Stick 2 cloves in each onion, add to the pan, and bring to a boil. Turn off the heat and let infuse for 20 minutes, uncovered. Strain, discarding the solids. Melt the butter in a separate saucepan and when it begins to bubble, add the flour. Stir together over medium heat to form a thick paste or roux. Gradually stir in the infused milk, bring to a boil, and simmer, stirring frequently, for 5 or 6 minutes. Season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Keep warm.

Meanwhile, bring a large saucepan of salted water to a boil and add the lasagne. Cook until just al dente, about 10 minutes or according to package directions. Drain and rinse the lasagne in cold water. Spread in a single layer on a wet towel to prevent it from sticking.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Using a lightly greased 9 by 12-inch baking dish, ladle in half of the white sauce and top with one-third of tomato sauce with meatballs and sausage. Cover with a layer of lasagne noodles, and then all of the ricotta, spreading it out gently and evenly. Cover with one-third of the tomato sauce and another layer of lasagne noodles. Top with the remaining white sauce and finally the remaining tomato sauce. Sprinkle with the Parmesan cheese.

Bake the lasagne in the oven for about 40 minutes, until the top is golden and bubbly (cover with foil if the top browns too quickly). Remove from the oven and let sit for 10 minutes before serving.

Notes: If using smaller pans, just keep alternating the various layers until the ingredients are all used up. If you prefer a milder filling, use plain Italian sausage rather than the spicy type.