

PACCHERRI LASAGNA PIE

I'm not gonna lie – this recipe takes some time. But it's quite a fun showstopper for a special occasion. You'll need a 9" spring form pan and some large hollow pasta tubes like paccherri. And if you make the Bolognese sauce a day ahead, it will make the whole process much easier. The flavors in the sauce will also have some time to meld. I use a Bolognese recipe based on Marcella Hazan's classic, changing up the meats and doubling the proportions. If I'm going to the trouble of making a Bolognese, I might as well have leftovers for next time.

INGREDIENTS (serves 8 – 10)

FOR THE BOLOGNESE

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

6 tablespoons butter

1 cup chopped onion

1 cup chopped celery

1 cup chopped carrot

3 cloves garlic minced

1 pound ground beef chuck

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound ground veal

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound ground pork

Salt

Fresh ground pepper

2 cups whole milk

Pinch nutmeg

2 cups dry white wine

3 cups canned imported Italian plum tomatoes, cut up, with their juice

FOR THE BECHEMEL

2 tablespoons butter

2 tablespoons flour

1- $\frac{1}{2}$ cups of milk (warm)

Grated nutmeg

Salt & pepper

FOR THE CHEESE MIXTURE

2 cups ricotta

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup Parmesan cheese (grated, small holes)

1 tablespoon fresh oregano (chopped)

1 tablespoon fresh basil (chopped)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked spinach

1 teaspoon garlic powder

1 teaspoon red pepper flakes

Salt and pepper

FOR THE ASSEMBLY

1 lb cooked Paccherri (prepared al dente as per instructions on box)

1 cup grated mozzarella

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated Parmesan

Fresh basil for garnish

PREPARATION

FOR THE BOLOGNESE

In a large Dutch oven, combine the oil and butter on medium heat. Add the onions and cook until they are translucent. Add the chopped celery and carrot. Stir and coat the vegetables and cook for 4 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute.

Add the meats, 1 teaspoon of salt and fresh ground pepper. Crumble the meat with a wooden spoon and brown.

Add milk and let mixture simmer gently until fully incorporated and you can no longer see the milk. Add a pinch or two of grated nutmeg and stir.

Add the wine, let it simmer until it has evaporated, then add the tomatoes and stir thoroughly to coat all ingredients well. When the mixture begins to boil, lower the heat to as low a simmer as possible. Cook uncovered for 3 hours or more, stirring from time to time. If the sauce starts to dry out, add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water when needed. At the end, however, no water at all must be left. The fat should have separated from the sauce. Mix all together and season to taste with salt and pepper.

FOR BECHAMEL

In a saucepan, melt butter until it starts to foam. Add flour and whisk for two minutes until sandy colored, but not brown. Slowly pour in milk and whisk until it starts to lightly boil. Lower flame to simmer for eight minutes to thicken, whisking often. Turn off heat, season with pinch of grated nutmeg, salt and pepper, and set aside. If film forms on top, remove before using.

FOR RICOTTA MIXTURE

In a medium sized bowl, mix the ricotta, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Parmesan, oregano, basil, spinach, garlic powder, and red pepper flakes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.

FOR ASSEMBLY

To make sure there is minimal leakage, use a large piece of aluminum foil to cover the bottom and outside sides of the spring form pan. Grease the inside of pan with olive oil.

Coat the bottom of the spring form pan with a layer of the Bolognese.



Next, stand the cooked pasta upright in the pan starting with an outside circle and continuing with smaller circles, filling the entire pan until packed in. (*You might want to test this the day before. Stand up the dried pasta in the spring form to*

see if you have enough to pack it in. The first time I made this, I had to use every last one. Pasta tubes can vary in size, so you don't want to be in the middle of the assembly and find out you don't have enough. Also, one or two might break, so you may need a few extra.)

Put the ricotta mixture in a Ziploc bag and cut a small hole in one corner. Squeeze the cheese mixture down towards the hole as if this is a pastry bag.

Fill each pasta tube halfway up with the ricotta filling. Tamp down the ingredients by lifting the springform pan about an inch above the counter and gently dropping it so that the ricotta makes its way to the bottom.

Using a ladle, cover the noodles with a thin layer of béchamel.

Spoon more Bolognese into the tubes filling them to the top. Spread a light layer over all the noodles so that the sauce seeps into the spaces between the tubes. Ladle another layer of béchamel. Tamp the springform pan again so all the ingredients settle.

If you have room, do another layer of ricotta, meat sauce and béchamel. Tamp the springform pan again.

Spread the mozzarella and Parmesan on top.

Place the pan on a baking sheet. Grease a piece of aluminum foil and cover the pie with the greased side down.

Bake for 35 minutes. Uncover; bake 20 minutes longer or until the top is bubbly and golden brown.

Let stand for 30 minutes. Run a knife along the outside edge and carefully open the spring form pan. It's important for the dish to cool enough so that the cheese sets a bit otherwise you'll have a sloppy mess.

Slice into pieces and top with remaining meat sauce. Garnish with Parmesan and a sprig of fresh basil.