



Sugar Apple

Posts From The Caribbean

Lasagna with Meat Sauce and Besciamella

This is Audrey's favorite lasagna, adapted from a recipe my sister sent me years ago and which I keep losing. It's the slightly cheesy besciamella (instead of ricotta) that Audrey and I like so much. This lasagna is kind of a hybrid. The use of besciamella or béchamel sauce is Italian while the large amount of tomato, garlic and oregano in the meat sauce is definitely more Italian-American.

This recipe makes more meat sauce than you'll need for the lasagna but I like to make extra for the freezer. You should have enough for the lasagna and to sauce an additional pound of pasta for another meal. I'm not a fan of the thick lasagna noodles with the wavy edges so I used the thin no-boil lasagna noodles. If you have time to make fresh pasta, that's even better.

Meat Sauce

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 large onion, peeled and chopped
3 fat cloves of garlic, peeled and finely minced
2 1/2 pounds ground beef
1 cup dry white wine
1 tablespoon dried oregano
1 bay leaf
2 teaspoons kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
2 28-ounce cans whole Italian plum tomatoes with their juice
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1/4 cup milk

Besciamella

1/2 stick (4 tablespoons) unsalted butter
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
2 cups whole milk
1 teaspoon kosher salt
grated fresh nutmeg
a handful of freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

1 pound no-boil lasagna noodles
a handful of fresh basil
1/4 pound fresh mozzarella cheese
olive oil and Parmigiano-Reggiano for serving, if desired

Make the meat sauce: Heat the olive oil in a large heavy skillet over medium heat, then add the onion and cook until soft and translucent, about 5-10 minutes. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the ground beef and cook until the meat is no longer pink and is just cooked through. Turn the heat up to high then add the wine and cook until the wine is reduced and almost cooked away. Stir in the oregano, bay leaf, salt, red pepper, tomatoes and tomato paste. Bring to a simmer, breaking up the tomatoes with a spoon. Stir in the milk, then cook at a low simmer for 2 hours. Take the sauce off the heat, taste for seasoning and reserve.

Make the besciamella: Melt the butter in a heavy saucepan over medium heat. Whisk in the flour and cook, stirring constantly, until the flour turns a light golden color and loses its raw flour smell, about 5-7 minutes. Whisk in the milk, a little at a time, until it's fully incorporated. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly, until the besciamella thickens to the consistency of a thin gravy. Remove from the heat, season with salt and some grated fresh nutmeg, and stir in the Parmigiano-Reggiano.

Preheat the oven to 375°.

Put the lasagna together: Butter a 9"x13" baking dish and put a few spoons of meat sauce in the bottom of the dish. Put a layer of noodles over the sauce, cutting or breaking the noodles into smaller pieces where needed so that the layer covers the bottom of the dish. Spoon a layer of meat sauce over the noodles, scatter some torn basil leaves over the sauce, then drizzle some besciamella over the meat sauce and basil. Continue layering noodles, meat sauce, basil and besciamella until the noodles and besciamella are used up. You want meat sauce and then besciamella at the top layer. Tear the mozzarella into rough pieces and scatter it over the top of the lasagna.

Cook the lasagna at 375° until heated through and bubbling, about 30-45 minutes. Remove from the oven and let stand for at least 10 minutes before serving. I like to serve the lasagna with a drizzle of good extra virgin olive oil and a sprinkling of Parmigiano-Reggiano, both optional. *Serves 6-8.*

Make ahead note: You can make the sauce a day in advance and it also freezes well. Just reheat gently before putting the lasagna together. You can put the lasagna together a few hours in advance and refrigerate it. Bring it to room temperature before baking.

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from the article *A Birthday Lasagna* posted on March 21, 2010