



THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES

A FOOD BLOG

Vegetarian Lasagna

Serves 8

The recipe looks more complicated than it needs to because of the homemade pasta. You can save yourself a lot of time (skip steps 1 through 4) by buying fresh pasta sheets instead of making and rolling out the spinach pasta. Or you can use a box of no-boil lasagna noodles, soaking them in hot water for 5 minutes before layering the lasagna.

Utilize your food processor! For the parmesan, mozzarella, fresh mushrooms, onion, and tomatoes (in that order).

You can make the whole lasagna ahead of time and refrigerate it overnight. Or you can freeze the whole lasagna. Let it defrost in the refrigerator overnight. To bake the lasagna straight from the refrigerator, just place it in the cold oven, then turn the oven onto 375°F to bake the lasagna. The lasagna will warm up as the oven heats.

You can also make the pasta dough and both sauces a day in advance and then assemble the layers right before baking.

If you keep fresh basil around, definitely mince up a few leaves and add them to the cooked tomato sauce. You may also want to sprinkle some on top of the lasagna when it comes out of the oven.

Spinach pasta:

5 ounces baby spinach, washed
1 egg
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour, plus (a lot) more for dusting

Tomato sauce:

$\frac{1}{2}$ ounce dried porcini mushrooms, rinsed
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 large onion, chopped fine (reserve $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the onions for the béchamel)
4 cloves garlic, minced
16 ounces mushrooms, minced
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup wine (optional; red or white is fine)
1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained and pureed
1 (14-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained and pureed
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper

Béchamel:

3 tablespoons unsalted butter
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup finely diced onions
3 garlic cloves, minced
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups milk
1 bay leaf

pinch nutmeg
¼ teaspoon salt
⅛ teaspoon pepper
½ cup grated parmesan cheese (1 ounce)

Assembly:

nonstick spray
8 ounces (2 cups) shredded mozzarella cheese

1. For the pasta: Place the spinach in a 12-inch skillet and add a few tablespoons of water (or if the spinach is wet from being washed, just add the wet spinach to the skillet). Turn the heat to high until the water boils, then reduce the heat and stir the spinach until it just wilts, about 1 minute. Remove the spinach from the pan (don't wash the skillet) and place it on a clean dishtowel. Pat and squeeze the spinach until it's very dry, then finely mince it.
2. Add the flour to a wide bowl or pie plate, then make a well in the center of the flour. Lightly beat the egg, then add it to the well with the chopped spinach. Stir the flour, egg, and spinach together until thoroughly mixed, then start kneading. Knead, adding flour as necessary to keep the dough from being sticky, until the dough is smooth and elastic, about 5 minutes. Don't be concerned if you need to add quite a bit of extra flour; the dough should be malleable but not at all sticky.
3. Divide the dough into 3 balls. Work with one ball of dough at a time and leave the others covered with a damp dishtowel (you can use the same one you used for drying the spinach). Flatten the dough slightly, then roll it through the widest setting on a pasta roller. Fold it in thirds like a piece of paper going into an envelope, then roll it through the pasta roller again, feeding it with one of the open sides first. If at any point the dough is sticky, brush it with flour. Repeat the folding into thirds and rolling a few times. Without folding, run the pasta through the widest setting once more. Adjust the pasta roller to the next-thinner setting and roll the dough through the machine. Continue to gradually thin the dough until the third-to-last setting. Brush it with flour if the dough starts to stick at all. If the strip of dough becomes too long to handle, cut it into two shorter strips and work with each strip separately. Repeat the rolling, folding, and thinning with the remaining balls of dough, laying the sheets of pasta on dishtowels.
4. Bring a large pot of water to a boil, then add 1 tablespoon salt and reduce the heat until the water is at a lively simmer instead of a vigorous boil. Cut the strips of dough into 8-inch lengths. One by one, dip each rectangle of dough in the water, leave it for about 10 seconds, then remove it and rinse it under running water. Lay the strips of dough on dishtowels.
5. For the tomato sauce: Place the dried porcini in a small saucepan and add just enough water to cover. Bring the water to a boil over high heat, then turn the burner off.
6. Heat the olive oil over medium heat in the same large skillet the spinach was cooked in. Add the onions and a pinch of salt and sauté, stirring occasionally, until the onions just brown around the edges, about 8 minutes. Add the garlic and mushrooms and continue cooking and occasionally stirring until the mushrooms start to brown. First they'll release a bunch of liquid, but then that will evaporate and they'll brown. Once they do, pour in the wine and cook, scraping the bottom of the pan, until the wine almost completely evaporates, then add the tomatoes, salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer. Carefully lift the porcini from their soaking liquid with a fork; mince them and add them to the sauce. Simmer the sauce over medium heat until thick, about 15 minutes.
7. For the béchamel: Heat the butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. When the foaming subsides, add the onions and garlic and sauté, stirring occasionally, until the onion is softened. Add the flour and stir continuously for 1 minute. Stirring constantly, gradually pour in the milk and reserved porcini liquid (pouring carefully so as to leave any grit behind in the small saucepan). Increase the heat to medium-high and bring the mixture to a light boil, stirring very frequently. Once the sauce starts to bubble, lower the heat to medium-low and let it simmer for 10 minutes, stirring in occasionally. Stir in the nutmeg, salt, pepper, and parmesan.
8. Assembly: Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 375°F. Spray a 9-by-13-inch pan with nonstick spray. Spread a thin layer of tomato sauce on the bottom of the pan, then add a layer of noodles. Spread ¼ of the béchamel on the noodles, followed by ¼ of the cheese, and ¼ of the tomato sauce. Repeat the

layering (noodles, béchamel, cheese, tomato sauce) twice more, then finish by adding a layer of noodles, then the last of the béchamel, the last of the tomato sauce, and the last of the mozzarella.

9. Spray a large sheet of aluminum foil with nonstick spray, then use it to cover the lasagna. Bake, covered, for 30 minutes, then remove the foil and continue to bake for another 15 minutes, until the lasagna is bubbling around the edges. Remove the pan from the oven and let the lasagna set for 10 minutes before cutting and serving.