



THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES

A FOOD BLOG

Sausage and Spinach Stuffed Shells

Serves 6

You probably won't use the whole box of shells, but a lot of them might be broken or could rip after being boiled, so it's nice to have some extra.

Feel free to use whatever your favorite tomato sauce is. I've provided the recipe I used, which is a simple sauce I like for serving over rich pastas with a lot of their own flavors, like these shells.

1 (12-ounce) box jumbo pasta shells
salt
16 ounces Italian sausage
1 onion, diced
3 cloves garlic, minced
¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
5 ounces spinach leaves, washed, coarsely chopped
1 (15-ounce) container ricotta (or 2 cups homemade ricotta)
8 ounces (2 cups) provolone, shredded
1 ounce (½ cup) parmesan, grated
2 eggs
Simple Tomato Sauce (recipe below, or 4 cups of your own sauce)

1. Adjust a rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 350 degrees.
2. Bring a large pot with at least 4 quarts of water to a boil. Add 1 tablespoon salt and the pasta shells; cook according to the package instructions. When the pasta is tender, use a large slotted spoon to transfer the shells to a dish towel.
3. Meanwhile, in a large skillet over medium-high heat, cook the sausage, breaking up large pieces, until it is no longer pink and has rendered some fat. Add the onion and ½ teaspoon salt; continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until the sausage is browned and the onion is softened. Add the garlic and red pepper flakes, stirring constantly for about 30 seconds, until fragrant. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the spinach leaves, letting the residual heat wilt the leaves. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl; stir in the ricotta, provolone, parmesan, and eggs.
4. Lightly coat the bottom of a 9 by 13-inch baking dish with tomato sauce. Fill each shell with 3 to 4 tablespoons of filling. Transfer the filled shells to the baking dish. After all of the shells are filled, evenly distribute the remaining sauce over the shells. Cover the dish with aluminum foil.
5. Bake for 20 minutes; remove the foil and bake for about 10 minutes longer, until bubbling around the edges. Let rest 5 minutes before serving.

Simple Tomato Sauce

Makes about 4 cups

Chop the tomatoes right in the can using kitchen shears. You can use diced tomatoes instead, but they won't break down as the sauce simmers.

2 teaspoons olive oil
½ small onion or 1 large shallot, diced fine
¼ teaspoon salt
2 cloves garlic, minced
¼ cup red or white wine
2 (28-ounce) cans whole tomatoes, undrained, chopped
1 tablespoon minced basil and/or parsley

In a large saucepan over medium heat, heat the oil until it flows like water when the pan is tilted. Add the onion and salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion just starts to brown around the edges, about 8 minutes. Add the garlic and red pepper flakes and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the wine, scraping up any browned residue on the bottom of the pan. Increase the heat to medium-high and add the tomatoes with their juice. Bring to a simmer, then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, stirring occasionally, about 15-20 minutes, until the sauce is thickened. Stir in the basil or parsley.