

Veggie Lasagna

It's time again to take advantage of the new harvest.

Lasagna is always a standby comfort food and a most convenient food for entertaining. This vegetarian version will be anchored with slices of seasonal eggplant and fresh spinach. I prefer whole-wheat lasagna noodles and homemade marinara sauce for this recipe.

Make Quark this morning: (This thick version of yogurt assembles in 5 minutes and needs 3 hours to drain.)

Place #4 coffee filter in a strainer over a medium-size bowl. Spoon 2 C. plain, nonfat yogurt into the filter. Let stand for 3 hours. Store the whey (clear liquid) in a container in the fridge. Use the whey tomorrow in the Gazpacho.

Preparation Time for Lasagna: 2 hours - Servings: 4-6

Organize Your Ingredients!

Notes on Organizing

Prep and organize ingredients on small plates or in bowls. Once everything's prepped and set out, the assembly will be a breeze. "Sweat" the eggplant first as part of the prep. Prep a total of 5 cloves chopped garlic: 4 for the Marinara Sauce and 1 for the Lasagna. Prep 1-1/4 C. of chopped onion: 1/3 C. for the Marinara Sauce and 3/4 C. for the Lasagna. Also, plan on using 1-2/3 C. red wine in the Marinara Sauce.

Eggplant

1 large eggplant (sliced into 1/2" thick slices)
4 tsp. salt

1/2 tsp. garlic powder
1 T. lemon juice
1/4 C. low-sodium vegetable broth
1 T. canola oil

Lasagna

1 package whole-wheat lasagna noodles (12 oz.)
1 tsp. olive oil
3 C. (12-14) cremini mushrooms (sliced)
1 tsp. garlic (smashed and chopped)
4 C. spinach (washed/coarsely chopped)
1 tsp. olive oil
1 tsp. balsamic vinegar
1 T. low-sodium vegetable broth
3/4 C. yellow onion (chopped)
1/2 C. shredded skim milk mozzarella mixed with
1/3 C. shredded Parmesan cheese
1/2 C. quark
1/2 C. low-fat Ricotta Cheese
1 raw egg (whisked)
1/2 tsp. nutmeg

Marinara Sauce

1 tsp. olive oil
2 cloves garlic (smashed and chopped)
1/2 C. red wine
1/3 C. yellow onion (chopped)

one 15 oz. can no-salt diced tomatoes
one 15 oz. can regular tomato sauce
another 1/2 C. red wine

2 T. dry basil leaves
1 T. dry oregano leaves
a few dashes Tabasco sauce

1 tsp. olive oil
another 2 cloves chopped garlic
another 2/3 C. red wine

Salad and Dressing

Fixings for a green salad

Il Simplicio Dressing:

3 T. Extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 tsp. Dijon Mustard
2 T. white balsamic vinegar
(You may substitute rice wine vinegar.)
1/4 C. low-sodium vegetable broth
pinch of salt

Let's Prepare, Cook, and Plate This!

Basic Assembly Instructions

After "sweating" the eggplant (see instructions below), assemble lasagna early in the day and refrigerate. Begin by putting pasta water on to boil.

Once you've got the Marinara Sauce made and meat browned, you're on your way.

Early Eggplant Prep

Place 1/2" thick slices of eggplant on a cookie sheet. Sprinkle with 2 tsp. salt. Let stand 45 minutes. Wipe bubbles of water from slices with a paper towel. Flip slices and repeat, sprinkling with salt and allowing time to sweat. Then place on paper towel until ready to cook.

Marinara Sauce

1. Brown 2 cloves chopped garlic in olive oil over medium-high heat. Add 1/2 C. red wine and bring to boil. Cook 1 minute.
2. Add onion and toss until wine is almost gone.
3. Add tomato sauce (rinse cans with additional second 1/2 C. red wine and add to sauce.)
4. Add spices and Tabasco. Bring to boil. Cover, reduce heat to low and cook 10-minutes.
5. Using a separate sauté pan, brown additional 2 cloves chopped garlic in oil. Add another 2/3 C. wine, bring to a boil, cook for about a minute and turn off heat. Let sit 10 minutes.
6. Add this additional wine/garlic reduction to the large pan. Stir well and remove from heat.

Final Eggplant Prep

1. Mix lemon juice, vegetable broth and garlic powder together. Set Aside.
2. Heat canola oil in large sauté pan. When the oil shimmers, place sweated and dried eggplant slices in hot oil and cook over medium-high heat until well browned on both sides.

* Place pasta water on to boil now.
3. Pour lemon juice mixture over the browned eggplant slices and toss until liquid cooks away. Remove eggplant from pan and set aside.

Lasagna Preparation

1. Cook noodles in lightly-salted boiling water for 8 minutes. Drain and rinse. Separate noodles as you rinse to be sure they don't stick together. I often leave them in a little cold water after rinsing.
2. Brown sliced mushrooms in olive oil. Add 1 clove chopped garlic and toss until garlic becomes fragrant. Remove from pan and set aside.
3. Measure spinach into a large bowl and toss with oil, vinegar and broth. Set aside.
4. Using same pan used to cook mushrooms, toss onions until they're translucent. Set aside.
5. Toss Mozzarella and Parmesan together in a bowl. Set aside.
6. Mix quark and ricotta with whisked egg and nutmeg. Set aside.

Finish Assembly, Bake and Plate This Meal!

Lasagna Assembly and Bake

Coat a 9X13" baking dish with oil and begin layering in Lasagna as follows:

Layer 1: 1/2 C. Marinara sauce, a layer of noodles, a layer of 1/2 of the of eggplant, all of the spinach and 1/2 of the Mozzarella/Parmesan mixture.

Layer 2: A layer of noodles, 1/2 C. sauce and all of the ricotta/egg mixture.

Layer 3: A layer of noodles, 1/2 C. sauce, covered with remaining eggplant and all of the mushrooms.

Layer 4: A layer of noodles, 1/2 C. sauce and remaining mozzarella/Parmesan cheese mixture.

- Hold in the fridge until ready to bake.

When ready to bake, preheat oven to 375°.

Cover dish with foil and place lasagna pan on a cookie sheet to catch any drippings. Cook in preheated oven for 1 hour. Set a timer.

When timer sounds, switch oven to broil setting. Remove foil and allow cheese to start to brown. This will happen quickly so stay with it. Remove lasagna from oven and rest it for 25-30 minutes.

Salad and Dressing

Make green salads on individual plates.

Il Simplico Dressing:

Combine dressing ingredients in a small jar with a tight-fitting lid and shake well.

Plate the Meal

When serving this lasagna, I often spoon 2 T. of marinara sauce onto each plate before I place the lasagna serving on the plate.

Serve salads, dressing and warm bread on the side.

What I've Learned from this Recipe

A note about why we "sweat" the eggplant: The salt causes the eggplant to shed water. As it bubbles to the surface, it can then be absorbed by dabbing the eggplant with a paper towel. Pulling out the extra moisture ("sweating") makes it easier to brown the eggplant later.

Let us know what you think, and ask any questions you may have! chezdon@plate6.com