Vegetable Lasagne

NIBBLEDISH CONTRIBUTOR

Ingredients

- 10 quarts (9 litres) salted water
- 1 recipe Spinach Pasta cut for lasagna (recipe follows)#1
- 1 recipe Bechamel Sauce (recipe follows)#2
- 1 recipe Country Style Ragu (recipe follows)#3
- 1 cup (4 ounces/125g) freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

#1 Spinach Egg Pasta (Pasta Verde)

- 2 jumbo eggs (2 ounces/60g or more)
- 10 ounces (300g) fresh spinach, rinsed dry, and finely chopped; or 6 ounces (170g) frozen chopped spinach, defrosted and squeezed dry
- 3&1/2 cups (14 ounces/400g) all purpose unbleached (plain) flour (organic stone ground preferred)

#2 Bechamel

- 4 tablespoons (2 ounces/60g) unsalted butter
- 4 tablespoons (2 ounces/60g) all purpose unbleached (plain) flour, organic stone ground preferred
- 2&2/3 cups (approx 570ml) milk
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- Freshly grated nutmeg to taste

#3 Country Style Ragu’ (Ragu alla Contadina)

- olive oil
- one big onion

- one garlic

- 1kg different vegetables
- salt, pepper
- 500ml milk
- 300ml red wine

Instructions

Ready for a new Daring Bakers Challenge Recipe? So the original recipe of this lasagne is with meat. But as I'm a vegetarian did I just changed the ingredients to some delicious, freshly vegetables. Check out my blog to learn more about Daring Bakers and to see all photos of the dish.

Method
Working Ahead:
The ragu and the béchamel sauce can be made up to three days ahead. The ragu can also be frozen for up to one month. The pasta can be rolled out, cut and dried up to 24 hours before cooking. The assembled lasagne can wait at room temperature (20 degrees Celsius/68 degrees Fahrenheit) about 1 hour before baking. Do not refrigerate it before baking, as the topping of béchamel and cheese will overcook by the time the center is hot.

Assembling the Ingredients:
Have all the sauces, rewarmed gently over a medium heat, and the pasta at hand. Have a large perforated skimmer and a large bowl of cold water next to the stove. Spread a double thickness of paper towels over a large counter space. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit (180 degrees Celsius). Oil or butter a 3 quart (approx 3 litre) shallow baking dish.

Cooking the Pasta:
Bring the salted water to a boil. Drop about four pieces of pasta in the water at a time. Cook about 2 minutes. If you are using dried pasta, cook about 4 minutes, taste, and cook longer if necessary. The pasta will continue cooking during baking, so make sure it is only barely tender. Lift the lasagne from the water with a skimmer, drain, and then slip into the bowl of cold water to stop cooking. When cool, lift out and dry on the paper towels. Repeat until all the pasta is cooked.

Assembling the Lasagne:
Spread a thin layer of béchamel over the bottom of the baking dish. Arrange a layer of about four overlapping sheets of pasta over the béchamel. Spread a thin layer of béchamel (about 3 or 4 spoonfuls) over the pasta, and then an equally thin layer of the ragu. Sprinkle with about 1&1/2 tablespoons of the béchamel and about 1/3 cup of the cheese. Repeat the layers until all ingredients are used, finishing with béchamel sauce and topping with a generous dusting of cheese.

Baking and Serving the Lasagne:
Cover the baking dish lightly with foil, taking care not to let it touch the top of the lasagne. Bake 40 minutes, or until almost heated through. Remove the foil and bake another 10 minutes, or until hot in the center (test by inserting a knife – if it comes out very warm, the dish is ready). Take care not to brown the cheese topping. It should be melted, creamy looking and barely tinged with a little gold. Turn off the oven, leave the door ajar and let the lasagne rest for about 10 minutes. Then serve. This is not a solid lasagne, but a moist one that slips a bit when it is cut and served.

#1 Spinach Egg Pasta (Pasta Verde)

Preparation: 45 minutes

Makes enough for 6 to 8 first course servings or 4 to 6 main course servings, equivalent to 1 pound (450g) dried boxed pasta.

Working by Hand:

Equipment

A roomy work surface, 24 to 30 inches deep by 30 to 36 inches (60cm to 77cm deep by 60cm to 92cm). Any smooth surface will do, but marble cools dough slightly, making it less flexible than desired.

A pastry scraper and a small wooden spoon for blending the dough.

A wooden dowel-style rolling pin. In Italy, pasta makers use one about 35 inches long and 2 inches thick (89cm long and 5cm thick). The shorter American-style pin with handles at either end can be used, but the longer it is, the easier it is to roll the pasta. Note: although it is not traditional, Enza has successfully made pasta with a marble rolling pin, and this can be substituted for the wooden pin, if you have one.

Plastic wrap to wrap the resting dough and to cover rolled-out pasta waiting to be filled.

It protects the pasta from drying out too quickly.

A sharp chef’s knife for cutting pasta sheets.

Cloth-covered chair backs, broom handles, or specially designed pasta racks found in cookware shops for draping the pasta.

Mixing the dough:
Mound the flour in the center of your work surface and make a well in the middle. Add the eggs and spinach. Use a wooden spoon to beat together the eggs and spinach. Then gradually start incorporating shallow scrapings of flour from the sides of the well into the liquid. As you work more and more flour into the liquid, the well’s sides may collapse. Use a pastry scraper to keep the liquids from running off and to incorporate the last bits of flour into the dough. Don’t worry if it looks like a hopelessly rough and messy lump.

Kneading:
With the aid of the scraper to scoop up unruly pieces, start kneading the dough. Once it becomes a cohesive mass, use the scraper to remove any bits of hard flour on the work surface – these will make the dough lumpy. Knead the dough for about 3 minutes. Its consistency should be elastic and a little sticky. If it is too sticky to move easily, knead in a few more tablespoons of flour. Continue kneading about 10 minutes, or until the dough has become satiny, smooth, and very elastic. It will feel alive under your hands. Do not shortcut this step. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap, and let it relax at room temperature 30 minutes to 3 hours.

Stretching and Thinning:
If using an extra-long rolling pin work with half the dough at a time. With a regular-length rolling pin, roll out a quarter of the dough at a time and keep the rest of the dough wrapped. Lightly sprinkle a large work surface with flour. The idea is to stretch the dough rather than press down and push it. Shape it into a ball and begin rolling out to form a circle, frequently turning the disc of dough a quarter turn. As it thins outs, start rolling the disc back on the pin a quarter of the way toward the center and stretching it gently sideways by running the palms of your hands over the rolled-up dough from the center of the pin outward. Unroll, turn the disc a quarter turn, and repeat. Do twice more.

Stretch and even out the center of the disc by rolling the dough a quarter of the way back on the pin. Then gently push the rolling pin away from you with one hand while holding the sheet in place on the work surface with the other hand. Repeat three more times, turning the dough a quarter turn each time.

Repeat the two processes as the disc becomes larger and thinner. The goal is a sheet of even thickness. For lasagne, the sheet should be so thin that you can clearly see your hand through it and see colours. Cut into rectangles about 4 by 8 inches (10 x 20 cm). Note: Enza says that transparency is a crucial element of lasagne pasta and the dough should be rolled as thinly as possible. She says this is why her housekeeper has such strong arms!

Dry the pasta at room temperature and store in a sealed container or bag.

#2 Bechamel

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Using a medium-sized saucepan, melt the butter over low to medium heat. Sift over the flour, whisk until smooth, and then stir (without stopping) for about 3 minutes. Whisk in the milk a little at a time and keep the mixture smooth. Bring to a slow simmer, and stir 3 to 4 minutes, or until the sauce thickens. Cook, stirring, for about 5 minutes, until the sauce thickens. Season with salt, pepper, and a hint of nutmeg.

#3 Country Style Ragu’ (Ragu alla Contadina)

Heat the oil and garlic in a high pan. Prepar all the vegetables before. (wash & cut). As the oil is hot give in the vegetables and cook for about 20 minutes. Give in the milk and red wine and let it cook on a slow heat.