

More Recipes from the Garden

There's nothing better than walking out your back door and picking fresh vegetables and herbs for the meal that night. That's what makes cooking and baking extra special and tasty. So, here is one of my extra special recipes I usually save for special occasions. I hope you enjoy it as much as we do.

Best Ever Manicotti

Sauce

- 3 tablespoons Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 1 ½ cup Onion, chopped
- 4 to 6 Garlic cloves, minced
- 4 cups of peeled seeded fresh blanched Tomatoes finely chopped
- ½ cup Water
- 1 ½ teaspoon Sugar
- 1 teaspoon Salt
- ½ teaspoon Pepper
- ¼ cup chopped fresh Basil (or 1 tablespoon dry Basil)
- 1 hand full each of fresh cut Marjoram and Oregano destemmed (or 1 teaspoon each dry Marjoram and Oregano)
- 1 Cayenne pod left whole

Filling

- 3 cups fresh Ricotta
- 2 large Eggs
- ½ cup finely grated Parmesan cheese
- ½ cup finely grated Romano cheese
- ½ finely grated Asiago cheese
- ½ cup chopped fresh Parsley
- ½ cup chopped Chives (we use garlic chives, if you don't have chives, use 1 finely diced clove of garlic)
- 1 cup chopped fresh Spinach
- ½ teaspoon Salt
- ½ teaspoon Black Pepper
- 2 cups fresh Mozzarella, grated

Other Ingredients

- 1 box of Manicotti Shells (about 12 to 14)
- 1 teaspoon of Salt
- 1 tablespoon of Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Plus 2 cups of shredded mozzarella

Preparation

- **Make Sauce:** Heat oil in a 5 to 6 - quart heavy pot over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking, add onion and pepper pod, then sauté, stirring occasionally, until onions are golden brown but not burnt. Add garlic and sauté, stirring, until browned, about 1 minute. Take out pepper pod and throw away, then add tomatoes with any juice, water, sugar, salt and pepper (if you are using dry herbs add them now) and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until thickened, about 45 minutes. If using fresh basil, marjoram and oregano add at the end and stir, then remove from heat. Let it stand while you do the filling and cook the shells.

- **Mix the Filling:** Mix ricotta, eggs, salt and pepper; then add parsley, chives and spinach; next add all the cheeses. Blend well. Set aside.
- **Cook the Shells:** DON'T overcook. In a large stainless-steel pot, boil enough water to cover the shells with about two more inches of water. Add salt and olive oil. Once the water comes to a full rolling boil add shells. Cook about 7 minutes. Take out immediately and pour cold water over the shells to stop the cooking process.
- **Fill the Shells:** With a cake piping bag, fill the shells.
- This makes two 9" by 13" cake pans full.
- Heat oven to 350 degrees.
- **Setup:** Place a thin layer of sauce in the bottom of each pan. Evenly divide filled shells between pans. Place remainder of sauce evenly over the shells. Then place the last portion of mozzarella over the shells.
- **Bake:** Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 30 minutes. Uncover and bake for 15 to 20 minutes more or until cheese is golden brown.
- **Remove from oven:** Let stand 10 minutes, then serve.

Excellent with a small garden salad and nice glass of red wine. I hope our followers will take the time to make this dish. Even though it takes some effort, it's a recipe well worth the time. It's a special dish that you might have for a special occasion or just to show someone they're special. Enjoy.

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Thanks, Sami