

Baked Ziti

Classic Italian-American baked ziti with three cheeses, Italian sausage, and rich marinara sauce. Perfect for family dinners and meal prep.

20 min

PREP

35 min

COOK

55 min

TOTAL

8

SERVINGS

Easy

DIFFICULTY

Ingredients

- 1 lb pasta
- 16 cup water
- 1 lb sausage
- 1 onion
- 2 clove garlic
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 4 cup marinara sauce
- 1 tsp rock salt
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp oregano
- 1 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp italian seasoning
- 2 cup ricotta cheese
- 2 cup mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup parmesan cheese

Instructions

1 Prepare for cooking

Preheat oven to 425°F (220°C). Bring 16 cups water to a rolling boil in a large pot over high heat.

2 Cook the pasta

Add 1 pound ziti pasta to the boiling water and cook according to package directions minus 1-2 minutes until

just shy of al dente. Drain pasta, reserving ½ cup cooking water, and set aside.

3 **Make the meat sauce**

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 pound Italian sausage, breaking it into small pieces with a spoon, and cook until browned and cooked through, about 6-8 minutes.

4 Add 1 diced onion and 2 minced garlic cloves to the skillet. Cook until onion is soft and translucent, about 4-5 minutes.

5 Stir in 4 cups marinara sauce, reserved pasta water, 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning, 1 teaspoon dried thyme, 1 teaspoon paprika, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon black pepper. Simmer for 10 minutes until slightly thickened.

6 **Assemble the baked ziti**

Spread a thin layer of meat sauce in the bottom of a greased 9x13 inch baking dish. Add cooked pasta and toss with remaining meat sauce until evenly coated.

7 Drop spoonfuls of 2 cups ricotta cheese evenly over the pasta mixture. Sprinkle 2 cups mozzarella cheese and 1 cup Parmesan cheese evenly over the top.

8 **Bake and serve**

Bake for 25-30 minutes until cheese is melted and golden brown on top and edges are bubbling. Let rest for 10 minutes before serving.

Tips

Cook pasta 1-2 minutes less than package directions since it will continue cooking in the oven, preventing mushy texture.

Reserve 1/2 cup of starchy pasta cooking water to help bind the sauce and create a silky consistency.

Use fresh mozzarella for the best melting quality and milder flavor, but drain it well to prevent excess moisture.

Layer Parmesan cheese on the bottom since it browns faster than mozzarella, creating better browning control.

Let the casserole rest for 10-15 minutes after baking to allow the cheese to set before cutting and serving.

Place the baking dish on a rimmed baking sheet to catch any potential overflow during baking.

Sauté vegetables thoroughly before adding to remove excess moisture that could make the dish watery.

Add a splash of red wine to the sauce while cooking for extra depth of flavor.