

timballo of pasta and meatballs serves 6 - 8



Timballo is an Italian dish of pasta or rice, combined with a rich, creamy sauce and baked in the oven. You can use any type of thick short pasta tubes; my favourite (and most easy to find) are penne.

This dish can be fully prepared in advance then refrigerated and brought to room temperature before cooking; check it is piping hot in the centre if you are cooking from cold. Serve with a green salad tossed in olive oil and sherry vinegar.

ingredients

750g / 1 lb 10 oz minced beef
2 garlic cloves, peeled, finely chopped
2 tbsp freshly chopped parsley
1 large free-range egg, beaten
115g / 4oz freshly grated Parmesan cheese
3 tbsp olive oil
400g / 14 oz penne
700g jar of passata (thick, sieved tomatoes)
40g / 1 1/2 oz butter
40g / 1 1/2 oz plain flour
400 ml / 14 fl oz milk
150g ball of mozzarella cheese, drained and patted dry then sliced

method

For the meatballs, combine the first 4 ingredients in a bowl with half of the Parmesan cheese. Season with salt and pepper then form into 18 - 20 balls. Chill for half an hour or so.

Heat 2 tbsp oil in a large frying pan and fry the meatballs all over until cooked through (about 5 minutes, turning carefully); you may need to do this in 2 batches. Drain on kitchen paper.

Cook the pasta until still "al dente" (with a little bite - i.e. cook for 1 - 2 minutes less than recommended on the packet) then drain and mix with the passata. Season well.

Make a white sauce by melting the butter in a saucepan then stirring in the flour. Cook,

stirring for half a minute or so then gradually add the milk, whisking to keep smooth. Cook for a few minutes or until smooth and thick. Stir in the remaining Parmesan cheese and season to taste.

To assemble, tip half the pasta in the base of a buttered large lasagne dish. Place the meatballs on top then place the mozzarella slices in between. Season, top with the remaining pasta. Slowly spoon over the cheese sauce, trying to cover as much as possible, but don't worry if not.

Cover loosely with oiled foil and bake in a preheated oven (200C / 400F / Gas 6) for 30 minutes then remove the foil and continue to bake for a further 20 minutes, or until piping hot. Allow to rest for 5 - 10 minutes before serving.

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