

Cardiologist's Nightmare Lasagna

2 28 oz cans crushed tomatoes
1 29 oz can tomato sauce
1 dash basil (to taste)
1 TBL oregano (to taste)
1 TBL molasses (blackstrap) or brown sugar
1 lb hot Italian sausage (bulk or uncased)
1 lb mild Italian sausage (bulk or uncased)
1¼ - 1½ lb lean ground beef
5 cloves garlic
1 large onion
1 or 2 20 oz bag(s) fresh spinach (washed)
15 oz Ricotta cheese
6 oz shredded Asiago cheese
6 oz shredded Romano cheese
8 oz (one full can) + 2/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 lb lasagna noodles
16 oz shredded Mozzarella cheese (part skim if Heart Healthy...ha, ha!)
Extra virgin olive oil

In a large, heavy bottomed pot, combine the cans of crushed tomatoes and tomato sauce and stir into the red sauce. Set the heat to medium to start cooking the red/meat sauce. Keep an eye on it because once the meat sauce starts to bubble, you'll need to cover and reduce heat to simmer/low. Remember to stir the sauce occasionally.

Heat a large skillet or shallow pan on medium and then individually brown and then drain each of the meats (hot and mild Italian sausages and then the lean ground beef). If necessary, split the sausages open and remove the casings before browning. Once each meat has been sufficiently drained, divide into two equal parts: stir ½ into the sauce and set the other ½ aside in a large mixing bowl (for cooling). Drain the grease from the skillet after each meat has been browned.

Now, it's time to prep the garlic, onions, and spinach. Peel and chop/mince the garlic cloves. Peel and finely chop the onion; set aside one third (cover and refrigerate). If required, wash and drain the fresh spinach. Coarsely chop the spinach (just grab a handful and take 3/8" slices) and place into a large mixing bowl.

Heat a large skillet or shallow pan on medium. In about 1 to 1½ TBL of olive oil, sauté the garlic (until just browning) and then add the remaining 2/3 of the chopped onion. Sauté until the onions until then turn a clear, golden color (i.e., beyond translucent but before crispy brown or burnt). Remove ½ of the sautéed garlic/onions mixture and stir into to the meat sauce.

Dump the chopped spinach into the skillet/pan...don't worry, it will quickly reduce as the heat unlocks the water from the leaves. Stir carefully and frequently to mix the spinach, garlic, and onions. After about 8 to 10 minutes, the water will mostly be cooked out of the spinach and it will give a slight green bubbly liquid when pressed. At this point, remove the spinach/onion/garlic mixture and add it to the browned meats in the mixing bowl. Cover this bowl and place in the fridge to cool. As the meat/spinach mixture cools, don't forget to watch and occasionally stir the meat sauce.

(Note: all of the above steps can be done the day before; just cover and refrigerate.)

After the meat sauce simmered for 1 to 1½ hours, add the remaining 1/3 of the chopped onions (as they were not previously cooked, they will provide a wee bit of crunch to the sauce). Remove the cooled meat/spinach mixture from the fridge. If necessary, transfer the mixture into a large mixing bowl and then add the Ricotta, Asiago, and Romano cheeses as well as 2/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese. Mix well.

Using a large pot 2/3 full of boiling water, drop the lasagna noodles in (alternating directions) and cook per directions. Drain the noodles.

Into the bottom of a couple of 2" deep baking pans (12 x 8 or 14 x 9), cover the bottom with a single layer of noodles. Over this, add a nominally ¼ inch thick layer of filling (see * Hint below) and cover completely with about four ladles of meat sauce. Over the sauce, spread about 3 oz of the shredded Mozzarella and then cover everything with a thin layer of grated Parmesan cheese. Repeat this layering process for at least two or three layers ending with either a layer of cheese-covered sauce or noodles (as preferred).

* *Hint:* To get a uniformly thick layer of filling, place a couple of large spoonfuls or slabs of chilled filling on a clean, plastic cutting board of the approximate pan size and smash it down into a thin (¼ inch thick) layer using a large spatula. Then use the spatula to lift off a section of filling at a time and place onto the noodles. Alternately, use a layer of parchment or wax paper on the cutting board and then "lay" the flattened/smooched filling into the pan. Fill in any "holes" as required before adding the sauce.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Cover the pans with parchment paper (optional) and then with aluminum foil. Bake for 90 minutes. Remove from oven and let stand ten or so minutes. (just pop in a loaf of fresh bread as you wait.)

Serve with a fresh garden salad, fresh warm bread with real butter & garlic, and (if you are old enough) red wine or beer (Note: not that cheap, pale yellow, ethylated rice water Pilsner/Lager crap—AKA "pre-urine"—college kids can afford but a real dinner beer like an ale, porter, or stout...beer the way God intended it to be made and consumed.