

Meat - Stuffed Manicotti

Ingredients:

Serves 4 to 5

- 1(8 ounce) package manicotti
- 1lb – 2 lb extra lean ground beef
- 8 ounces grated shredded mozzarella cheese
- ½ cup or several large spoonfuls of sauce (can substitute milk)
- 5 or 6 fresh basil leaves – chopped
- 2 Tablespoons fresh parsley – chopped
- 1 cup freshly grated parmesan cheese
- Salt & pepper to taste
- 1 (26-ounce) jar of organic tomato basil spaghetti sauce
- 1 or 2 slices of mozzarella cheese (to patch split noodles – optional)

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Brown ground beef chopping it into very tiny pieces while cooking and drain grease.
3. Cook the manicotti noodles according to package directions for al dente. This is very important – do not overcook or the noodles will be too soft, and they will split while filling them.
4. Drain the noodles gently by pouring some water out using a hand strainer to hold back the noodles. Then, slowly fold the noodles into a bowl strainer. Dumping the noodles into a bowl strainer with all the water too fast may cause them to split. Rinse gently with cool water several times. Keep the noodles in the strainer but lift it onto a bowl so the noodles continue to drip and cool.
5. Combine cooked ground beef, egg, mozzarella, bread, milk, parsley, basil, salt and pepper. Add a few spoonfuls of sauce (or milk) to the ground beef mixture for flavor and to add softness if it appears too firm. Stuff each manicotti shell using a long narrow spoon. Fill one end then turn the noodle and fill the opposite end, pushing gently until the entire noodle is full.
6. Spread a little sauce on the bottom of a 13x9x2" baking pan. Place manicotti noodles side by side. If a noodle splits while stuffing, you can put a piece of mozzarella over the split to keep it together. Pour spaghetti sauce over top and spread over each noodle with a spoon. Noodles that are not covered with sauce may become dry. Top with a little freshly grated parmesan cheese.
7. Bake in a 350-degree oven for 40 - 50 minutes, or until the top cheese is melted and slightly browning on the ends.
8. Serve fresh grated parmesan cheese for additional topping.