

Cheese Manicotti

Servings 4 - 5

Ingredients

1 box manicotti pasta
1 pint (16 oz) ricotta cheese
8 ounces shredded mozzarella cheese
1 cup of freshly grated Parmesan cheese
1 large egg - beaten
2 or 3 TBS fresh parsley - chopped
4 or 5 basil leaves – chopped (optional)
salt and ground black pepper to taste
1 (16-ounce) jar of organic tomato basil spaghetti sauce

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. 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.
1. 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.
2. Combine ricotta, mozzarella cheese, parmesan cheese, egg, parsley, basil, salt and pepper. Mix well. Stuff each manicotti shell using a long narrow spoon or fold the filling into a pastry bag fitted with a large tip to pipe the filling into the noodles. A large zip lock bag with the corner tip removed can substitute for a pastry bag. I find it faster and believe I have more control using a long narrow spoon but either method is fine. Fill one end then turn the noodle and fill the opposite end, pushing gently until the entire noodle is full.
3. 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.
4. Bake in a 350-degree oven for 40 - 50 minutes, or until the top cheese is melted and slightly browning on the ends.
3. Serve fresh grated parmesan cheese for additional topping.