



Caprese Lasagnette Casserole

Fresh cheese, fresh tomatoes - Summer Comfort at its best

Ground “Meat” Sauce

- 1 Tablespoon olive oil
- 1 onion, peeled, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon (each) ground fennel seeds; Italian seasoning
- 12 ounces ground plant-based beef
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 cups prepared marinara sauce

Directions: Heat oil in large skillet, add onion, sprinkle with ground fennel and Italian seasoning; sauté to soften onions. Add ground beef, break into chunks, sprinkle with salt and pepper; cook on medium high to medium for about 10 minutes or beef is no longer pink. (If plant-based beef is very lean, add a few Tablespoons of water to the skillet and scrape up any browned fond.) If your “meat” has excess fat; drain. Place cooked beef in the bowl; stir in marinara sauce. Set aside.

Pasta Sauce

- 8 ounces Lasagnette Ricce or shells pasta, cooked, drained

1/2 Tablespoon olive oil
1 (8 oz) container fresh mozzarella cheese, cubed
1 cup ricotta cheese
1 large egg
1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1/2 teaspoon dried parsley flakes
1 (8 oz) container fresh mozzarella cheese, sliced, divided
2 Tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

Directions:

Cook pasta according to package directions; toss with olive oil.

In a large bowl, combine cubed mozzarella cheese, ricotta cheese, egg, Parmesan cheese, and parsley. Stir in pasta.

Spoon pasta mixture evenly into greased 10-inch ovenproof pan or baking dish that's about 2-inches deep.

Spoon ground "meat" sauce evenly over the pasta layer.

Top with 5 ounces thin slices of fresh mozzarella sauce

Sprinkle with grated Parmesan cheese

Bake in preheated 350-degree F. oven, covered, for 40 minutes or hot.

Place under the broiler for about 2 to 3 minutes until lightly golden brown.

Caprese Topping:

1 (10 oz.) package cherry tomatoes, halved

1/3 cup chopped red onion

2 Tablespoons olive oil

1 Tablespoon white balsamic vinegar

Salt; ground black pepper to taste

1 cup fresh basil leaves, torn

Directions: Chop the remaining 3 ounces fresh mozzarella into small cubes.

In a medium-sized bowl, combine mozzarella cubes, tomato halves, and onions. Toss with olive oil and vinegar; season with salt and black pepper to taste. Before serving, stir in torn fresh basil leaves.

Before Serving Casserole: Spoon Caprese Topping around the edge of the casserole. Serve warm with any remaining Caprese Topping in a small bowl. Serves 6 to 8

Cook's Note: The casserole can be prepared using regular ground beef or plant-based ground beef. If you can't find fresh mozzarella, substitute regular shredded Mozzarella cheese.

About the Recipe: A comfort casserole, filled with Italian lasagna flavor, is a delightful dinner dish. This recipe uses summertime fresh ingredients, adding a popular Caprese salad topping, dotted with fresh juicy tomatoes, basil, and cubes of fresh mozzarella. A bonus is that it is a whole meal in one dish and so easy to prepare.

