

THREE-CHEESE MANICOTTI

8 servings

My friend Annie shared this recipe with us. She likes it with cottage cheese, and we like it with ricotta. The dish is another wonderful meatless dish and easy to put together. It also makes a great do-ahead dinner—prepare up to the baking point, refrigerate, and then bake as usual.

CAN DO AHEAD

This dish can be made ahead of time. Refrigerate until ready to bake. Lower the oven temperature 25 degrees and add 15 minutes to the baking time.

SAUCE:

- 1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 small bay leaf
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

12 uncooked manicotti shells

FILLING:

- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 1/2 cups ricotta or cottage cheese
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese, divided
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- Pinch of ground black pepper

1. Optional step: Pulse the tomatoes in a blender until crushed. Set aside.
2. To make the sauce, cook the onion and garlic in the oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat, until the onions are tender but not browned. Add the tomatoes, tomato sauce, sugar, oregano, thyme, bay leaf, and salt. Bring to a boil, decrease the heat, and simmer uncovered for 45 minutes, stirring often. Add water if needed to thin the sauce. Remove the bay leaf.
3. While the sauce is cooking, cook the manicotti shells according to package directions, being careful not to overcook. Rinse in cold water and drain. Separate the cooked shells and lay them out on a 15-inch sheet of aluminum foil to keep them from sticking together (you will reuse the foil to cover the baking dish). If you tear the shells, you can put the torn sides back into place after you fill them.
4. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
5. In a medium bowl combine the filling ingredients: eggs, ricotta, 1 cup of the mozzarella cheese, Parmesan cheese, parsley, salt, and pepper.
6. Working on the foil, stuff the filling into the shells with a narrow rubber spatula or your fingers. Do not overstuff or you may run out of filling.
7. Pour half the cooked sauce into a 13 by 9-inch baking dish. Arrange the filled manicotti in the baking dish. Pour the remaining sauce over the shells. Sprinkle with the remaining mozzarella cheese. Cover the dish with the foil. You may refrigerate the prepared manicotti for up to 24 hours before baking.
8. Bake for 30 minutes. Remove the foil cover and serve with Italian or French bread and a salad.

