

Spaghetti and Meatballs

For the Meatballs

2 pounds ground beef chuck
1 large onion minced
4 garlic cloves minced
4 large eggs
1/3 cup dry bread crumbs
3/4 cup grated Parmigiano
1/2 cup minced parsley
2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano
2 teaspoons fresh thyme
Salt and pepper to taste
Oil for frying

For the Tomato Sauce

1/2 cup olive oil
2 red onions, chopped
1 small carrot, grated
1/4 cup minced parsley
2 teaspoons fresh thyme
2 teaspoons minced fresh rosemary
1/2 teaspoon dried chili flakes
4 minced garlic cloves
3 28-ounce cans of plum tomatoes
1/4 cup slivered fresh basil
1 teaspoon sea salt
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
3 tablespoons tomato paste (optional)
1-2 teaspoons sugar (optional)

For the Meatballs

To make the meatballs, place the ground chuck in a large bowl with the onions, the garlic, the eggs, the bread crumbs, the Parmigiano, the parsley, oregano, thyme, salt and pepper to taste. Mix gently with your fingertips then knead a bit until smooth, but do not over mix. Take a small piece of the mixture, flatten it, and fry it in a little oil to taste for seasoning.

If necessary, add more salt, pepper, cheese or herbs to suit your taste. When you've arrived at the taste you like, roll the meatballs in the palm of your hands until they are smooth. I prefer them about 1 1/2 inches in diameter.

Heat 1/2-inch of oil in a large skillet, and fry the meatballs, turning them so they brown all over. Set them aside while you prepare the sauce.

For the Tomato Sauce

In a very large pot or Dutch oven, heat the 1/2 cup of olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion, grated carrot, parsley, thyme, rosemary, and chili peppers, and cook gently, stirring until the vegetables are softened and the onion just begins to color. Lower the heat and stir in the minced garlic, cooking for only about two minutes, without letting the garlic brown or burn.

Crush the tomatoes in a large bowl. I like to do this with my fingers. Add all the tomato pulp and the liquid to the pot of onions, vegetables, and herbs. When the tomatoes are heated, add the slivered basil, the sea salt and black pepper.

If you prefer a thicker sauce, add the optional tomato paste. When the sauce has cooked awhile, taste it for sweetness. Only if the tomatoes are very sour, add the optional sugar. Taste again for any other seasoning adjustments.

Add the fried meatballs to the sauce and simmer gently for at least 1½ hours. Can be done ahead to this point, then reheated as you begin cooking the pasta.

To Serve

Bring a large kettle of salted water to a full boil, and add enough spaghetti to feed the number of guests you have. A pound of spaghetti will feed 3 to 4 people. Cook just until al dente then drain it completely in a colander.

Return the spaghetti to the kettle off the heat and add several large spoonfuls of the hot tomato sauce (not the meatballs), mixing thoroughly. Cover and let the sauce absorb for about 1 minute. Serve the spaghetti on plates, and top with 2 or 3 meatballs plus more sauce. Decorate each serving with a few basil leaves.

On the side, serve a bowl of grated Parmigiano, as well as a bowl of extra sauce for those who want it.