

Quick and Easy Baked Penne and Italian Sausage

This recipe is for Baked Penne and Italian Sausage. This is like lasagna, but without as much preparation and cooking time. I love the fresh and bold flavors that are found in this easy to make dish. You can easily make this dish as spicy or as mild as your family prefers. I also simply love a good pasta dish, and this recipe is one of my favorites.

Special Notes

- You can easily double this recipe to feed a larger crowd or to freeze one pan for later.
- This is an excellent dish to make as part of Meal Train to help a friend in need of a meal. I also provide them with bagged Cesear Salad, French bread and a simple dessert.
- You can prepare the dish and then cook it the next day.
- You can freeze an uncooked version of the dish. I bake dishes to freeze in disposable aluminum pans. I wrap a completely cooled pan completely in plastic wrap. If the pan comes with an aluminum lid, I then place it on top making sure the edges are all turned under. Finally, I wrap the top with foil.
- Please note that all the items I used for the dish were store brands except for the sausage and the pasta sauce. I normally buy Kroger brand sausage when they have it buy one get one free, but did not have any in the freezer.
- You can use frozen onions to cut down on the preparation time. I normally chop three white onions on the weekend to use during the week. I can cut the pieces smaller than the frozen version and it is usually cheaper.
- You can add raw spinach after the first layer. You will need to add 10-15 minutes to the cooking time
- You can use chopped fresh garlic or use the garlic that comes in a jar, and you refrigerate. I find that in this recipe it does not change the flavor and the garlic in the jar is less prep.

Ingredients:

Cheese Mixture:

- 15 ounces of Ricotta Cheese
- ½ cup of grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 egg, mixed with a fork
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon Italian Seasoning

Additional Cheese:

- 1 1/2 cups shredded Parmesan Cheese
- 3 cups Shredded Mozzarella Cheese

Meat Sauce:

- 1 pound of Italian sausage.
- ½ cup of diced onions
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 24 ounces of your favorite pasta sauce. I used Carbone for this recipe, and I love this sauce but only purchase I when it is on sell.

Pasta:

- 1 pound of Penne Pasta
- Olive Oil

Instructions:

1. Turn the oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9x13 baking pan with cooking spray.
2. Use a fork to mix all the ingredients for the cheese mixture.
3. Start the water for the pasta and follow the directions on the box for al dente noodles.
4. Start on the meat mixture while you are cooking the pasta. Place the sausage, onion, and garlic in a large skillet. Cook on medium heat until the meat is well cooked. Use a meat masher during the cooking process to ensure that the meat is all broken apart.
5. Turn the cooked meat mixture off and use a paper towel to dab the excess grease of the meat mixture.
6. Pour the jar of pasta sauce into the skillet with the meat. Place ¼ of a cup of warm water in the sauce jar and shake to release the rest of the sauce. Pour the water in the skillet with the meat and stir well
7. Drain the water from the cooked pasta and mix the pasta and meat sauce together.
8. Pour half the noodle mixture in the bottom of the baking pan.
9. Coat both sides of a spatula with olive oil spray or cooking spray. This makes it easier to spread the cheese mixture on top of the noodles.
10. Spread all the cheese mixture on top of the bottom layer of noodles.
11. Sprinkle ¾ a cup of shredded Parmesan Cheese and 1 cup of mozzarella cheese on top of the cheese mixture.
12. Pour the rest of the noodles over the cheese and cheese mixture.
13. Cover this top layer with the remaining Parmesan and mozzarella cheese.
14. Spray one side a sheet of foil with cooking spray and loosely place that, with the sprayed side down, over the baking dish.
15. Place the baking pan in the oven and bake for 30 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for 10 minutes. If you are like me and like your cheese broiled, switch the oven to broil and broil for 2 minutes. I suggest checking it every 30 seconds while it is broiling.
16. Remove the dish from the oven and rest it for at least 10 minutes. This will allow you to cut it like a lasagna.
17. Serve with garlic bread and salad.