



mushroom lasagna + lasagna bolognese

Notes: This recipe will yield two large pans of lasagna, one with a meat sauce, one with sautéed mushrooms. The first will be thicker than the second, but not by much. If this bothers you immensely, you can either sauté extra mushrooms (the pasta and béchamel amounts will give you a little extra, enough that you can stretch another layer) or only put 1/4 between each layer, and building one higher. The Bolognese sauce portion makes double what you will need. I cannot in good conscience let you go through that effort without giving you extra for a later time. The béchamel always makes a bit more than needed. You can dial it back by 20 to 25% if you don't want a margin of extra, however, any extra can be heated with some grated cheese for an excellent macaroni-and-cheese sauce. Trust me. I have this designed as a three-day affair because I prefer my dinner party prep to be relaxed and low-stress. The first day, you make the meat sauce. The second day, you do most of the work -- making the pasta, béchamel and assembling both beasts. On the day of the party, after it has begun, as they only take 45 minutes to bake, you only have to bake it, leaving the day free to make whatever else you've dreamed up, or a nap, so you can enjoy the party more!

Credits: The mushroom lasagna is inspired by Ina Garten. The bolognese portion of the meat lasagna is adapted from Anne Burrell.

Bolognese sauce

1 medium onion, coarsely chopped (1-inch pieces are fine)
1 large or 2 slim carrots, coarsely chopped
2 ribs celery, coarsely chopped
3 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped
2 to 3 tablespoons olive oil
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper
2 pounds ground chuck, brisket or round or combination
1 1/4 cups tomato paste (from 2 6-ounce cans)
2 cups red wine, preferably hearty but really, anything you like to drink
Water as needed
2 bay leaves
A few sprigs thyme, tied in a bundle

Mushroom Filling

2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons butter, divided
1 1/2 pounds cremini or portobello mushrooms

Pasta

3 cups all-purpose flour
4 large eggs
3/4 teaspoon table salt
2 to 4 tablespoons water, if needed

Béchamel

2 large cloves garlic, minced
8 cups whole milk
2 sticks unsalted butter
1 cup all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
Freshly grated nutmeg
Freshly ground black pepper
2 teaspoons table salt

To assemble

1 2/3 cups finely grated Parmesan (for the Bolognese)
+ 1 cup (for the mushroom) (if you have a food processor, cut the parmesan into chunks and blend it until it is powdery; it saves a lot of time)



[Day 1 of 3; Day 3 = Dinner Party] Make the Bolognese sauce: In a food processor, pulse onion, carrots, celery, and garlic until finely chopped. Heat a moderate-sized Dutch oven (4 to 5 quarts) over medium-high heat. Once hot, coat the bottom of the pan with two to three tablespoons of oil. Once it is hot, add the chopped vegetables and season them generously with salt and pepper. Cook the vegetables until they are evenly brown, stirring frequently, about 15 minutes.

Add the ground beef and seasoning again with salt and pepper. Brown the beef well and again, don't rush this step. Cook for another 15 minutes. Add the tomato paste and cook for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the red wine, using it to scrape up any stuck bits in the pan. Cook the wine until it has reduced by half, about 5 more minutes. Add water to the pan until the water is about 1 inch above the meat. Toss in the bay leaves and the bundle of thyme and stir to combine everything, bringing it to a low simmer.

Here's how the next 3 to 4 hours will go: You'll keep a pitcher of water near the stove. You'll stir the sauce from time to time. As the water in the sauce cooks off, you'll want to add more but you don't want to add more than 1 to 2 cups at a time or you'll have boiled meat sauce (bleh) rather than something thick and robust with flavor. Taste it from time to time and add more seasoning if needed. Simmer for 3 to 4 hours.

You'll have about 8 to 8 1/2 cups of sauce but will only need 4 for the lasagna. Freeze the rest until needed. You'll thank yourself.

[Day 2] Make your pasta: Combine all of the pasta ingredients in a food processor. Run the machine until the mixture begins to form a ball. You're looking for dough that is firm but not sticky. If needed, add water a drop at a time until it comes together. Place ball of dough on a lightly floured surface and invert a bowl over it. Let it rest for an hour.

Get your work area ready; I like to line a large tray with waxed paper. Dust the waxed paper with flour. Keep more waxed paper and flour nearby.

Working with a quarter of the dough at a time, run in through your pasta roller on the widest setting (usually "0"), then repeat this process with the roller set increasingly smaller (1, 2, 3) until the pasta is very thin. My Atlas machine goes to 9 but I almost always stop at 8 because this setting makes for thin, delicate pasta that's not so fragile that I'm pulling my hair out with frustration trying to move it around.

If you find your dough sticking, lightly flour it. If it gets too big to handle, cut it in half. If the piece gets too wide for the machine or becomes annoyingly irregularly shaped, I re-"fold" the dough by folding the sides of the dough into the middle, like an envelope, and press it flat. Then, run the piece back through the machine with the open sides up and down on the widest setting again (0) working your way thinner. This allows the machine to "press" any trapped air out.

Lay your pasta on the floured waxed paper in a single layer, trying to keep the pieces from touching. Flour the tops of them and place another sheet of floured wax paper on top. Repeat this process with the remaining dough and as many layers of pasta you need.



Next, cook your pasta: Cut your pasta lengths into square-ish shapes. The fun thing about making fresh pasta for lasagna is that the shape doesn't matter; you're going to tile together whatever you have and nobody will care if it took 9 or 16 bits to patch the layer together. Bring a large pot of water to boil. Have ready a skimmer, a large bowl of ice water and a large tray or platter that you've drizzled or spritzed with oil. Boil several of squares of noodle at a time for 1 to 2 minutes each (1 minute if you, indeed, went to the thinnest setting on your machine; 2 if you, like me, stopped one shy of thinnest). Scoop them out with your skimmer, swish them in the ice water and lay them out (still wet is fine) on the oiled platter. Repeat with remaining pasta. It's okay to have your noodles touch; they shouldn't stick together in the short period of time until you begin assembling but if you're nervous, you can drizzle or spritz each layer very lightly with more oil.

Prepare mushrooms: Discard portobello mushroom stems and/or trim the ends of the cremini stems. Dice mushrooms small (about 1/4-inch cubes). Heat olive oil and 1 tablespoon butter over medium in the bottom of the large, wide pot you used to cook the noodles earlier, or in a large sauté pan. Cook the mushrooms with a couple pinches of salt for about 5 minutes, or until they are tender and release their juices, then simmer until juices cook off. Adjust seasonings and stir in second tablespoon butter to finish.

Make your béchamel: Melt your butter in the bottom of a medium-to-large saucepan over medium heat. Once melted, add your flour and stir it into the butter until smooth. Cook the mixture together for a minute, stirring constantly. Pour in a small drizzle of your milk*, whisking constantly into the butter-flour mixture until smooth. Continue to drizzle a very small amount at a time, whisking constantly. Once you've added a little over half of your milk, you'll find that

you have more of a thick sauce or batter, and you can start adding the milk in larger splashes, being sure to keep mixing. Once all of the milk is added, add the salt, garlic, nutmeg (if using) and few grinds of black pepper, and bring the mixture to a lower simmer and cook it, stirring frequently, for 10 minutes. Taste and adjust seasonings if needed.

Assemble mushroom lasagna:

- Spread 1/4 cup béchamel in the bottom of first 9x13, deep baking dish or lasagna pan
- 1st layer cooked noodles
- 1/4 to 1/3 cup béchamel, don't worry about making it even
- 1/3 of the sautéed mushrooms
- 1/4 cup parmesan
- Repeat twice
- Final layer noodles
- A little of the remaining béchamel on top, then
- 1/4 cup parmesan

Assemble lasagna bolognese:

- Spread 1/4 cup béchamel in the bottom of second 9x13, deep baking dish or lasagna pan
- 1st layer cooked noodles
- 1 cup bolognese
- 1/2 cup béchamel, don't worry about making it even
- 1/3 cup parmesan
- Repeat three times
- Final layer pasta
- A little of the remaining béchamel on top, then
- 1/4 cup parmesan

Let them rest overnight on Day 2: Covered with foil in the fridge.



Day 3, or Dinner Party Day: If you can, take your lasagnas out an hour or two before needed to bring them to room temperature. They'll bake more evenly.

While your guests are having cocktails, bake your lasagnas: In an oven heated to 400 degrees. Total baking time is between 30 and 45 minutes. If you bake them at the same time, likely the higher amount. I like to keep the foil on for the first half of the

baking time and remove it for the second half. Try to get the tops nice and brown. Because the pasta is so thin, it will be crackly like delicious potato chips, not leathery and unpleasant like store-bought noodles when they get too browned. People will fight over the corner piece.

Let the lasagnas rest for 10 minutes before serving.