

Moussaka - Μουσακάς (moussakas)



Moussaka is an eggplant- or potato-based dish, often including ground meat, which is common in the Balkans and the Middle East, with many local and regional variations. The modern Greek variant was created in the 1920s by Nikolaos Tselementes.

SERVES	PREP	COOK	TOTAL	CUISINE
Serves 6	45 minutes	1 hour 15 minutes	2 hours	Greek

Ingredients

- 3 medium aubergines (eggplants), cut into 1 cm (1/2 in) slices lengthways
- 3 medium potatoes, peeled and cut into 1 cm (1/2 in) slices
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, finely diced
- 2 garlic cloves, finely grated
- 500 g (1 lb 2 oz) beef mince
- 2 tbsp tomato purée
- 400 g tin chopped tomatoes
- 120 ml (4 fl oz) dry red wine



- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground allspice
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tbsp chopped flat-leaf parsley
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 50 g (1 3/4 oz) unsalted butter
- 50 g (1 3/4 oz) plain flour
- 600 ml (1 pint 1 fl oz) whole milk, warmed
- 1/4 tsp ground nutmeg
- 2 large egg yolks
- 75 g (2 1/2 oz) kefalotyri or Parmesan, finely grated
- 20 g (3/4 oz) breadcrumbs, for the top

Method

1. Heat the oven to 200°C fan (220°C/425°F/gas 7). Arrange the aubergine slices on trays, brush both sides lightly with some of the olive oil, and season with salt. Roast for 20–25 minutes, turning once, until softened and lightly browned at the edges.
2. Meanwhile, bring a saucepan of water to the boil over high heat. Add the potato slices and simmer over medium heat for 8–10 minutes until just tender at the edge but not collapsing. Drain well and leave to steam dry.
3. Make the meat sauce: heat 1 tbsp olive oil in a large pan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook for 8 minutes, stirring, until soft and translucent.
4. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute more, just until fragrant.
5. Increase the heat to medium-high and add the mince. Cook for 6–8 minutes, breaking it up with a spoon, until well browned and any liquid has evaporated.
6. Stir in the tomato purée, then pour in the red wine and let it bubble for 2–3 minutes to reduce and lose its raw alcohol smell.
7. Add the chopped tomatoes, cinnamon, allspice, bay leaf, parsley, salt and pepper. Lower the heat to low and simmer gently for 25–30 minutes, stirring now and then, until thick, glossy and almost spoonable. Remove the bay leaf and set aside.
8. Make the béchamel: melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Whisk in the flour and cook for 2 minutes, stirring constantly, until it smells faintly nutty and the raw flour taste has cooked out.



9. Gradually whisk in the warm milk in a steady stream to prevent lumps. Cook over medium heat for 5–7 minutes, whisking, until the sauce is smooth and thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.
10. Take the pan off the heat. Whisk in the nutmeg, then the egg yolks and half the grated cheese. Taste and season lightly with salt and pepper; the sauce should be creamy and well seasoned.
11. Reduce the oven to 180°C fan (200°C/400°F/gas 6). Lightly oil a deep 30 x 20 cm (12 x 8 in) baking dish. Layer in the potatoes, then half the aubergines, then all the meat sauce, then the remaining aubergines, pressing gently to compact the layers.
12. Spoon the béchamel evenly over the top, scatter with the remaining cheese and the breadcrumbs, and bake for 35–40 minutes until deeply golden, bubbling at the edges and set in the centre.
13. Leave the moussaka to rest for at least 20 minutes before cutting, so the layers hold together cleanly.

To serve

Serve in generous squares with a crisp green salad and plenty of bread to mop up the sauce. A dry Greek red or a light-bodied rosé suits it well.

