

Pastitsio - Παστίτσιο (pastitsio)



A baked pasta dish layered with ground meat, béchamel sauce, and cheese.

SERVES	PREP	COOK	TOTAL	CUISINE
Serves 8	35 minutes	1 hour 15 minutes	1 hour 50 minutes	Greek

Ingredients

- 500 g (1 lb 2 oz) bucatini or thick tubular pasta
- 2 tbsp fine salt, for the pasta water
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, finely diced
- 2 garlic cloves, finely grated
- 750 g (1 lb 10 oz) beef mince
- 2 tbsp tomato purée
- 400 g (14 oz) tinned chopped tomatoes
- 125 ml (4 fl oz) dry red wine
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground cloves



- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tsp fine salt
- 1/2 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 60 ml (2 fl oz) water, as needed
- 40 g (1 1/2 oz) unsalted butter
- 40 g (1 1/2 oz) plain flour
- 600 ml (1 pint 1 fl oz) whole milk, warmed
- 1 small pinch freshly grated nutmeg
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 80 g (2 3/4 oz) kefalotyri or Parmesan, finely grated
- 1 tbsp olive oil, for greasing
- 30 g (1 oz) kefalotyri or Parmesan, finely grated, for the top

Method

1. Make the meat sauce first. Set a large frying pan over medium heat and warm the olive oil for 1 minute, then add the onion and cook for 6-8 minutes, stirring often, until soft and translucent but not browned.
2. Add the garlic and cook over low heat for 30 seconds, just until fragrant. Stir in the beef mince, increase to medium-high heat and cook for 6-8 minutes, breaking it up with a spoon, until no pink remains and the meat is lightly browned.
3. Stir in the tomato purée and cook for 1 minute to take off the raw edge. Add the tinned tomatoes, wine, cinnamon, cloves, bay leaf, salt and pepper, then bring to a gentle simmer over medium heat.
4. Reduce to low heat and cook uncovered for 25-30 minutes, stirring now and then, until the sauce is thick, glossy and no longer watery. If it looks too tight before the meat is tender, add a little water and continue to simmer.
5. Meanwhile, cook the pasta. Bring a large pan of water to a rolling boil over high heat, add the salt and the pasta, and cook for 1-2 minutes less than the packet instructions so it is still firm at the centre. Drain well and discard the bay leaf from the meat sauce.
6. Mix the drained pasta with the beaten eggs, grated cheese and a ladleful of the meat sauce so it is lightly coated. This helps the bottom layer set and adds flavour throughout.
7. Preheat the oven to 180°C fan/200°C/400°F/gas mark 6. Grease a deep baking dish, about 30 x 22 cm, with the olive oil.



8. Spread half the pasta in the dish, pressing it down into an even layer. Spoon over the meat sauce and level it with the back of a spoon, then top with the remaining pasta.
9. Make the béchamel. Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat, then stir in the flour and cook for 1-2 minutes, whisking, until it smells lightly nutty and the mixture looks sandy.
10. Gradually whisk in the warm milk a little at a time over medium heat, whisking constantly to prevent lumps, then cook for 5-7 minutes until thick and smooth and it coats the back of a spoon.
11. Take the pan off the heat and stir in the nutmeg and a little salt. Leave to cool for 2 minutes, then whisk in the beaten eggs and half of the grated cheese so the sauce stays silky rather than scrambling.
12. Pour the béchamel over the pasta and spread it to the edges in a smooth layer. Scatter over the remaining cheese, then bake for 35-40 minutes until puffed, deeply golden and set in the centre.
13. Rest the pastitsio for at least 20-30 minutes before cutting, so the layers settle and slice cleanly.

To serve

Cut into neat squares and serve warm with a simple green salad, tomato salad or wilted greens, plus crusty bread for the sauce. A glass of dry red wine suits it well, and a little extra grated cheese at the table is welcome.

