

Butternut squash lasagna (adapted from recipe by Giada De Laurentiis)

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Cook's note: The no-boil lasagna noodles can be substituted with fresh spinach lasagna sheets. Look for fresh lasagna sheets in the refrigerated section of specialty markets.

Ingredients:

1 tablespoon olive oil
1 (1 1/2 to 2-pound) butternut squash, peeled, seeded, and cut into 1-inch cubes
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup water
3 amaretti cookies, crumbled
1/4 cup butter
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
3 1/2 cups whole milk
Pinch nutmeg
3/4 cup (lightly packed) fresh basil leaves
12 no-boil lasagna noodles
2 1/2 cups shredded whole-milk mozzarella cheese
1/3 cup grated Parmesan

Instructions:

1. Heat the oil in a heavy large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the squash and toss to coat. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.
2. Pour the water into the skillet and then cover and simmer over medium heat until the squash is tender, stirring occasionally, about 20 minutes (you can roast the squash as well). Cool slightly and then transfer the squash to a food processor. Add the amaretti cookies and blend until smooth. Season the squash puree, to taste, with more salt and pepper.
3. Melt the butter in a heavy medium-size saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour and whisk for one minute. Gradually whisk in the milk. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat.
4. Reduce the heat to medium and simmer until the sauce thickens slightly, whisking often, about five minutes. Whisk in the nutmeg. Cool slightly.
5. Transfer half of the sauce to a blender*. Add the basil and blend until smooth. Return the basil sauce to the sauce in the pan and stir to blend. Season the sauce with salt and pepper, to taste.
6. Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 375 degrees.
7. Lightly butter a 13-by-9 by-2-inch glass baking dish. Spread 3/4 cup of the sauce over the prepared baking dish. Arrange 3 lasagna noodles on the bottom of the pan. Spread 1/3 of the squash puree over the noodles. Sprinkle with 1/2 cup of mozzarella cheese. Drizzle 1/2 cup of sauce over the noodles. Repeat layering three more times.
8. Tightly cover the baking dish with foil and bake the lasagna for 40 minutes. Sprinkle the remaining mozzarella and Parmesan cheeses over the lasagna. Continue baking uncovered until the sauce bubbles and the top is golden, 15 minutes longer. Let the lasagna stand for 15 minutes before serving.

*When blending hot liquids: Remove liquid from the heat and allow to cool for at least 5 minutes. Transfer liquid to a blender or food processor and fill it no more than halfway. If using a blender,

release one corner of the lid. This prevents the vacuum effect that creates heat explosions. Place a towel over the top of the machine, pulse a few times then process on high speed until smooth.

Kelly's notes:

1. Instead of amaretti cookies, can use graham crackers and ½ tsp. almond flavoring
2. You can use other kinds of winter squash – hubbard, acorn, carnival, etc.
3. I prefer to roast the squash instead of sautéing. Wash squash, cut squash in half, remove seeds. Spray open side with olive oil mist or cooking spray, then place cut side down in backing pan. Roast at 400 for 40-60 minutes until you can easily pierce the squash with a fork. Remove flesh and continue with recipe as above.
4. I use skim milk instead of whole. The sauce will not thicken as easily, so I add extra Wondra flour (superfine/quick cooking) when heating the sauce.
5. I also use part-skim mozzarella cheese.
6. I preserve my summer garden basil by pureeing with a little olive oil and freezing – this is what I use in place of whole basil leaves if I make this dish in the autumn or winter, when I don't have any fresh.
7. This recipe freezes well – prepare up to the cooking stage and freeze. I usually pop into the oven frozen and add time to the cooking, keeping the foil on to prevent burning.