

## **MAMA SMINK'S MEATBALL CASSEROLE**

This casserole basically has 4 ingredients: mini-meatballs, mini-penne pasta, tomato/spaghetti sauce, and shredded mozzarella. It can be made with store bought prepared ingredients, a combination of store bought meatballs and home made sauce, or all home made, depending on your personal preference and time available. I've frequently made the quick version on short notice, as well as my usual "Mama Smink" version. Feel free to adapt the recipe to your personal preferences. The important things are to use mini meatballs and to keep the meatball to pasta ratio at approximately 50/50 so that it is "meatball casserole" rather than pasta with some meatballs. The recipe makes approximately 16 cups.

### **Quick Version:**

- 30 oz. bag frozen mini-meatballs (80 count) -- or approximate equivalent\*\*
  - 56-60 oz. meatless spaghetti sauce (Prego, Ragu, Hunts, whatever)
  - 16 oz. box mini penne (Safeway) or mezze penne (Barilla) -- regular penne if mini not available
  - 3 cups (24 oz.) shredded mozzarella
  - 1/2 steam pan size foil pan (16 cups) If you have a bit more than fits in a 1/2 steam pan, just turn up the edges and it should all fit.
1. Fix pasta according to package directions until done (firm); drain and rinse
  2. Heat spaghetti sauce
  3. Add frozen meatballs and simmer on low heat for 45 minutes, stirring often
  4. Mix meatballs, sauce, and pasta
  5. Add shredded mozzarella, and mix
  6. Bake at 400 for 25-30 minutes until cheese is melted

### **Mama Smink's Version:**

Instead of prepared spaghetti sauce, use 56-60 oz. of home-made sauce -- my recipe below or your own home-made favorite:

- 2 28-oz. cans tomato sauce
- 1 15 oz. can petite diced tomatoes
- 2 Tablespoons oregano
- 1 Tablespoon basil
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh garlic or 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 chopped onion or 2 Tablespoons dried onions
- 1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese

1. If using fresh onion and minced garlic, cook in 1 tablespoon olive oil until onion is translucent
2. Add petite diced tomatoes, 2 cans of tomato sauce, oregano, basil, and pepper (and dried onions and powdered garlic, if using them instead of fresh)
3. Simmer on low heat for 45 minutes, stirring often
4. Add parmesan cheese and simmer for 15 minutes more, stirring often
5. Adjust seasonings to taste throughout simmering
6. Add frozen meatballs
7. Simmer for 30 minutes, adjusting seasoning to taste
8. Mix meatballs, sauce, and cooked, drained pasta, and shredded mozzarella and proceed as above

### **For Serious Gourmet Cooks:**

Use home-made meatballs -- your favorite recipe or mine:

- 2 lbs. lean ground beef
  - 3/4 cup bread crumbs
  - 2 eggs
  - 1/2 cup milk
  - 1 tablespoon dried oregano
  - 2 teaspoons dried basil
  - 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
  - 2 Tablespoons dried onion flakes
  - 1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley
  - 1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese
1. Form into 1 inch balls
  2. Bake on broiling pan at 400 degrees for 15 minutes (fat will drain off)
  3. Add to home made tomato sauce and simmer for 30 minutes, stirring frequently
  4. Adjust seasoning of sauce to taste
  5. Mix meatballs, sauce, and cooked, drained pasta, and shredded mozzarella and proceed as above

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