

Spicy Mushroom Lasagne

Ingredients

Serves 6

750g chestnut mushrooms, halved
500g oyster mushrooms
135ml olive oil, plus extra for greasing
60g dried porcini mushrooms
30g dried wild mushrooms
2 dried red chillies, roughly chopped
(deseeded for less heat)
500ml hot vegetable stock
1 onion, peeled and quartered
5 garlic cloves, roughly chopped
1 carrot, peeled and quartered

2-3 plum tomatoes, quartered
75g tomato paste
130ml double cream
60g pecorino romano, finely grated
60g parmesan, finely grated
5g basil leaves, finely chopped
10g parsley leaves, finely chopped,
plus an extra teaspoon to serve
250g dried lasagne sheets
(that's about 14 sheets)
salt and black pepper

Method

Preheat the oven to 230°C fan-forced. Put the chestnut and oyster mushrooms into the large bowl of a food processor in three or four batches and pulse each batch until finely chopped (or finely chop everything by hand). Toss them in a large bowl with 3 tablespoons of oil and 1 teaspoon of salt and spread out on a large, 40cm x 35cm parchment-lined, rimmed baking tray. Bake for 30 minutes near the top of the oven, stirring three times throughout, until the mushrooms are golden-brown; they will have reduced in volume significantly. Set aside. Reduce the oven temperature to 200°C.

Meanwhile, combine the dried mushrooms, chillies and hot stock in a large bowl and set aside to soak for half an hour. Strain the liquid into another bowl, squeezing as much liquid from the mushrooms as possible to get about 340ml: if you have less, top up with water. Very roughly chop the rehydrated mushrooms (you want some chunks) and finely chop the chillies. Set the stock and mushrooms aside separately.

Put the onion, garlic and carrot into the food processor and pulse until finely chopped (or finely chop by hand). Heat 60ml of oil in a large pan or pot on medium-high heat. Add the onion mixture and fry for 8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until soft and golden. Pulse the tomatoes in the food processor until finely chopped (or finely chop by hand), then add to the pan along with the tomato paste, 1½ teaspoons of salt and 1¼ teaspoons of freshly

cracked black pepper. Cook for 7 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the rehydrated mushrooms and chillies and the roasted mushrooms and cook for 9 minutes, resisting the urge to stir: you want the mushrooms to be slightly crisp and browned on the bottom. Stir in the reserved stock and 800ml of water. Once simmering, reduce the heat to medium and cook for about 25 minutes, stirring occasionally, until you get the consistency of a ragu. Stir in 100ml of the cream and simmer for another 2 minutes, then remove from the heat.

Combine cheeses and herbs in a small bowl. To assemble the lasagne, spread one-fifth of the sauce in the bottom of a round 28cm baking dish (or a 30cm x 20cm rectangular dish), then top with a fifth of the cheese mixture, followed by a layer of lasagne sheets, broken to fit where necessary. Repeat these layers three more times in that order, and finish with a final layer of sauce and cheese: that's five layers of sauce and cheese and four layers of pasta.

Drizzle over 1 tablespoon each of cream and oil. Cover with foil and bake for 15 minutes. Remove the foil, increase the temperature to 220°C and bake for 12 minutes, turning the dish round halfway. Turn the oven to the grill setting and grill for a final 2 minutes, until the edges are brown and crisp. Cool for 5 minutes, then drizzle over the remaining tablespoon of cream and oil. Sprinkle over the remaining parsley, finish with a good grind of pepper.





Tastes Like Home edited by Anastasia Sanoieas PHOTOS BY JONATHAN LOVEKIN



Ixta says...

I recall very clearly the moment I first fell truly, madly, deeply in love with food. The year was 1994 (I was three), the setting was Ristorante Pizzeria Acone, a community-run restaurant in the Tuscan village of Acone, perched 600 or so metres up the mountain where I spent my formative childhood years. Picture vineyards and olive groves as far as the mind's eye can see.

The dish was Penne all'Aconese, famous for miles around and loved by young, old and everyone in between (our dog Giacomino was a particular fan). This unassuming dish is a combination of undeniably good things. The recipe is a closely guarded secret but some ingredients can be detected easily: a soffrito base, ground pork, cream, hints of tomato, the spicy numbing undertones of dried chillies and plenty of black pepper. But what makes it truly transcendental, and thus makes the restaurant a site of gastronomical pilgrimage, is the complex, earthy and deeply umami flavour that comes from dried porcini mushrooms. Chopped into little pieces, the porcini permeates the sauce, lifting it to cosmic heights while also providing a satisfying textural contrast to the pork.

Penne all'Aconese, more than any other dish in the world, tastes like home to me, and this recipe for spicy mushroom lasagne pays homage to it, my first love. While the bulk of this ragu is a combination of fresh mushrooms, most of the flavour comes from the dried porcini. Flavour and texture come together here seamlessly to create a dish where meat won't be missed. We have long relied on mushrooms to fill the gap left by meat, and for good reason: savoury, earthy and meaty both in taste and texture, mushrooms tick a whole lot of boxes. We ask for a lot of mushrooms in this recipe – fresh and dried, and we ask for a couple of hours of your time, but the result is well worth the effort and I guarantee this lasagne will win you over. Dare I say that it's so good, it might even inspire your very own pilgrimage to Acone, the source of the mythical sauce on which this recipe is based.

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