

Cheesy Spinach Stuffed Shells: Easy Comfort Food Dinner

Cheesy Spinach Stuffed Shells: Your Go-To Comfort Food Classic



OVEN
300°F

TIME
11 min

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INGREDIENTS

- 24 uncooked large pasta shells
- Pinch of salt and drizzle of oil (for pasta water)
- 48 oz spaghetti sauce (or as needed, I always use extra!)
- 2 cups diced onion (white or yellow)
- 3-4 cloves garlic (smashed and minced)
- 5 oz fresh baby spinach, chopped
- 16 oz whole milk ricotta cheese
- 1 heaping cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese (approx. 2 oz)
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning blend (I love using salt-free Mrs. Dash)
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp dried parsley
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1/2-1 tsp crushed red pepper flakes (adjust to your spice preference)
- 1/8 tsp dried oregano
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1-2 large eggs (optional, for a fluffier ricotta filling)
- 1-2 cups freshly grated mozzarella cheese

Swaps and Notes:

Pasta Shells: While jumbo shells are traditional, you can also use manicotti or even layer the filling like a lasagna if you can't find shells.

Spaghetti Sauce: Use your favorite brand of jarred spaghetti sauce for convenience, or whip up a batch of homemade marinara. I always recommend having extra on hand for saucier results!

Spinach: Fresh baby spinach is best here, but you can use frozen chopped spinach (thawed and squeezed very dry) in a pinch.

Ricotta Cheese: Whole milk ricotta yields the creamiest, richest filling. Part-skim can be used, but the texture might be slightly less decadent.

Cheese Blend: For the Parmesan and mozzarella, freshly grated cheese melts better and has superior flavor compared to pre-shredded varieties.

Eggs in Filling: Adding eggs helps bind the filling and makes it lighter and fluffier. If you prefer a denser filling, you can omit them.

Spice Level: Adjust the crushed red pepper flakes to your liking. For a milder dish, use ½ tsp or omit. For more heat, go for 1 tsp or more.

Step-by-Step Directions:

Preheat Oven & Prep Dishes: Preheat your oven to 350 degrees F (175°C). Prepare 1-2 large glass baking dishes (depending on the size of your shells and how many you're making) with a one-inch layer of spaghetti sauce on the bottom. For extra saucy shells, don't be shy with the sauce here!

Cook Pasta Shells: Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Add a drizzle of oil to the water to help prevent sticking. Add the large pasta shells and boil for approximately 11 minutes, or until they are tender but still al dente. Drain the shells well and set them aside to cool slightly.

Prep Veggies & Measure Ingredients: While the shells are boiling, prep your vegetables: dice the onion, mince the garlic, and chop the fresh baby spinach. Measure out all the remaining ingredients for the filling and seasonings so they're ready for easy mixing and assembly.

SautØ Aromatics: In a small pan, sautØ the diced onions and minced garlic together over medium-high heat until the onions are softened and translucent, about 5-7 minutes. Remove from heat.

Prepare Ricotta Filling: In a large mixing bowl, fold together the whole milk ricotta cheese, freshly grated Parmesan cheese, chopped spinach, Italian seasoning blend, garlic powder, dried parsley, dried basil, crushed red pepper flakes, dried oregano, and salt and pepper to taste.

Add SautØed Veggies & Eggs (Optional): Add the sautØed onions and garlic to the ricotta mixture and mix well. If you desire a thicker, fluffier filling, add 1-2 gently whisked large eggs to the filling and mix until just combined.

Stuff the Shells: Spoon the generous filling into

each cooked pasta shell. This is easiest with a small spoon or a piping bag (if you're feeling fancy!). Arrange each stuffed shell neatly atop the spaghetti sauce layer in your prepared casserole dish(es).

Add Final Touches: If desired, drizzle extra spaghetti sauce on top of the shells, or leave the tops of the shells bare to showcase the beautiful filling. Top generously with freshly grated mozzarella cheese and an extra sprinkling of Parmesan cheese if desired. For an extra burst of flavor, I also like to sprinkle some additional red pepper flakes and dried basil on top of the mozzarella cheese.

Bake: Cover the baking dish lightly with foil. Bake in the preheated oven for 20-30 minutes, or until the filling is hot and bubbly, and the sauce is simmering. If the cheese has not melted or browned to your liking, remove the foil at the end and bake an additional 5-10 minutes, or until golden and bubbly.

DIRECTIONS

1. Let's get these delicious : Cheesy Spinach Stuffed Shells baked and ready for dinner!
2. **Preheat : Oven & Prep Dishes:** Preheat your oven to 350 degrees F (175°C). Prepare 1-2 large glass baking dishes (depending on the size of your shells and how many you're making) with a one-inch layer of spaghetti sauce on the bottom. For extra saucy shells, don't be shy with the sauce here!
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11. **Tips for Success:** Don't Overcook Shells: Cook the shells until they are al dente. They will continue to cook in the oven, and you want them firm enough to handle for stuffing.
12. **Cool :** Shells Slightly: Allowing the shells to cool slightly after draining makes them easier to handle and stuff without tearing.
13. **Freshly :** Grate Cheese: It makes a huge difference in how the cheese melts and the overall flavor!
14. **Adjust :** Seasoning: Taste the ricotta filling before adding the raw egg (if using) and adjust salt, pepper, and herbs to your liking.
15. **Extra :** Sauce: Don't be afraid to add extra sauce on the bottom and top - it keeps the shells moist and adds so much flavor.
16. **Serving Suggestions and Pairings:** These Cheesy Spinach Stuffed Shells are a complete meal on their own, but they pair wonderfully with a simple side. Serve them with a crisp green salad tossed with a light vinaigrette to cut through the richness. Warm garlic bread or crusty Italian bread is also a must for soaking up that delicious sauce! For other great Italian-inspired or cheesy comfort food dishes, you might want to try my Classic Spaghetti Recipe with Homemade Sauce or my speedy This Instant Pot Lasagna Is My Favorite Way to Make Comfort Food Fast.
17. **Storage and Leftover Tips:** Leftover Cheesy Spinach Stuffed Shells store beautifully. Place them in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3-4 days. To reheat, cover lightly with foil and bake in a 300°F (150°C) oven until heated through, or microwave individual portions. You can also assemble the entire casserole dish ahead of time (without baking), cover tightly with plastic wrap and foil, and refrigerate for up to 24 hours. Add an extra 10-15 minutes to the baking time if baking from cold.
18. **More Recipes You Will Love:** If you enjoyed these comforting stuffed shells, here are a few more recipes that I think you'll absolutely love:

19. For another fantastic crowd-pleasing casserole, try my This Mexican Chicken and Rice Casserole Is My Favorite One-Pan Dinner That's Always a Hit.
20. If you love cheesy goodness, my : These Chicken Enchiladas Are My Go-To for Cozy Crowd-Pleasing Dinners are a must-make.
21. And for a fun, bite-sized cheesy appetizer, give Easy Cheese Stuffed Chicken Wontons with Ranch (Golden, Crunchy, Addictive!) a try!
22. Final Thoughts: Cheesy Spinach Stuffed Shells are the epitome of hearty, comforting Italian-American cuisine. They're perfect for a family dinner, a potluck, or a cozy night in. With their creamy filling, savory sauce, and melted cheese, every forkful is pure bliss. Give this recipe a try, and I guarantee it will become a beloved staple in your home!
23. What's your favorite way to enjoy pasta? Share your thoughts in the comments below, and be sure to follow Chef Maniac for more delicious and family-friendly recipes!

SWAPS & NOTES

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I always recommend having extra on hand for saucier results!

Spinach: Fresh baby spinach is best here, but you can use frozen chopped spinach (thawed and squeezed very dry) in a pinch.

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More recipes: [ChefManiac.com](https://chefmaniac.com)

Original recipe: <https://chefmaniac.com/cheesy-spinach-stuffed-shells-easy-comfort-food-dinner/>