

The Ultimate Cheesy Baked Ziti: A Classic Family Comfort Food Recipe

The Ultimate Cheesy Baked Ziti: The Hearty Comfort Food Your Family Deserves



OVEN
375°F

TIME
8 min

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INGREDIENTS

1 pound ziti pasta: The ridges help the sauce cling to every bite.

2 tablespoons olive oil: For sautéing your aromatics.

1 onion, chopped: White or yellow onions work best.

3 cloves garlic, minced: Fresh is always better than the jarred stuff!

1 pound ground beef: I recommend an 80/20 or 90/10 lean-to-fat ratio.

1 (28 oz) can crushed tomatoes: Provides the perfect base for our meat sauce.

1 teaspoon dried basil & 1 teaspoon dried oregano: The classic Italian duo.

Salt and black pepper: To taste.

1 (15 oz) container ricotta cheese: For that essential creamy layer.

1 egg, beaten: To bind the ricotta.

2 cups mozzarella cheese, shredded: For that perfect cheese pull.

1 cup Parmesan cheese, grated: To add a salty, nutty finish.

Swaps and Notes:

The Meat: You can easily swap the ground beef for Italian sausage if you want an extra kick of spice.

The Pasta: If you can't find ziti, penne or rigatoni are excellent substitutes.

Vegetarian Option: Simply omit the beef and add sautéed mushrooms or spinach to the sauce for a

veggie-forward version.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

Prep the Oven: Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C). Grease a 9x13 inch baking dish lightly with cooking spray or butter.

Boil the Pasta: Cook the ziti in a large pot of boiling salted water. Tip: Cook it for about 8 minutes (slightly less than the package directions) so it's al dente. It will finish cooking in the oven. Drain and set aside.

Build the Sauce: In a large skillet, heat olive oil over medium heat. Sauté the onion and garlic until soft (about 5 minutes). Add the ground beef, browning it thoroughly. Drain any excess fat to prevent the dish from being greasy.

Simmer: Stir in the crushed tomatoes, basil, oregano, salt, and pepper. Let this simmer for about 10 minutes to allow the flavors to meld.

The Ricotta Mix: In a separate small bowl, whisk together the ricotta cheese and the beaten egg until smooth.

Layer It Up: Spread half of your cooked pasta into the baking dish. Top with half of the meat sauce, half of the ricotta mixture, and half of the mozzarella and Parmesan.

Repeat: Add the remaining pasta, sauce, ricotta, and top it all off with the rest of the cheese.

Bake: Cover the dish with foil. Bake for 25 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for another 10 minutes. You're looking for the cheese to be golden and bubbly.

Tips for Success:

Don't Overcook the Pasta: If the pasta is too soft before it goes in the oven, it will turn into mush. Aim for a firm bite.

Freshly Grated Cheese: If you have the time, grate your mozzarella from a block. Pre-shredded cheese is coated in potato starch to prevent clumping, which can hinder a perfect melt.

Let it Rest: Give the ziti 5-10 minutes to sit after taking it out of the oven. This allows the sauce to thicken and makes it easier to serve clean slices.

Serving Suggestions and Pairings:

Nutritional Information (Per Serving):

Calories: 485 kcal

Protein: 28g

Carbohydrates: 42g

Fat: 22g

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12. **Serving Suggestions and Pairings:** Baked Ziti is a heavy hitter, so I like to pair it with something light or a crowd-pleasing appetizer. Start the meal with a Baked Brie Appetizer to keep the cheese lovers happy.
13. **If you are hosting a larger party and need variety,** these Easy Cheesy Chicken Sliders make a great side-kick, or you can lean into the finger-food vibe with Sheet Pan Quesadillas.
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18. **Fiber:** 3g
19. **Storage and Leftover Tips: Refrigerator:** Store in an airtight container for up to 4 days.
20. **Freezer:** You can freeze this dish before or after baking. If freezing before baking, wrap tightly in plastic wrap and foil; it will last up to 3 months.
21. **Reheating:** Reheat in the oven at 350°F covered with foil to keep the moisture in, or microwave individual portions with a splash of water.
22. **More Recipes You Will Love:** If you enjoyed this hearty Italian classic, you have to try these other fan favorites:
23. **Classic :** Spaghetti with Homemade Sauce
24. **Instant :** Pot Lasagna
25. **Easy :** Cheesy Chicken Sliders with Marinara

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

Original recipe: <https://chefmaniac.com/the-ultimate-cheesy-baked-ziti-a-classic-family-comfort-food-recipe/>