

Stuffed Shells Italiano

Recipe by Tom Westerman

For 16 Stuffed Shells

18 Jumbo Shells (2 extra for torn shells or extra room in pan), boiled in salted water, a couple minutes less than package instructions suggest. Barely al dente is good. About 9 minutes. Rinse with cold water. Drain.

Filling for Shells

15 Oz tub Ricotta Cheese

1 Cup Mozzarella Cheese plus 1 Cup to cover

½ cup grated Parmesan Cheese

2 tsp Italian Seasoning

1 tsp salt, or 1 tsp garlic salt and omit fresh garlic

2 tsp minced garlic

Black Pepper to taste

2 Tbs Parsley (Italian or regular), chopped

10 Oz bag Frozen Spinach, sauteed in olive oil until thawed and tender (pinch of S&P) then cooled, or equivalent in fresh spinach (a bunch or two to equal four cups roughly chopped, sauteed until reduced in half)

1 Egg, beaten

¼ to ½ tsp Red Pepper Flakes (optional)

Olive oil

-Mix all ingredients together in mixing bowl

Sauce

24 Oz jar of your Favorite Marinara Sauce (Rao's, e.g.)

2 Cloves minced Garlic

Pinch of Italian Seasoning

Or, make your own marinara with a big can of tomato puree, a can of diced tomatoes (enough tomato product to make 24 ounces), salt and pepper to taste, a pinch of sugar, ~ 1 Tbs dried Italian seasoning, and or equivalent amount dried oregano and basil, a clove or two of fresh minced garlic, a little olive oil, simmer for up to an hour.....Some people also like to sauté some diced onions (or onions and diced carrots) in olive oil first before adding the rest of the ingredients. You can also add a whole carrot and fish it out later. Some add fresh torn (not cut with a knife) basil. Hard to ruin marinara. Just watch the salt content.

To Assemble Shells

Using a soup spoon, stuff each shell full with the ricotta/spinach mixture. Spoon a layer of marinara (~1 cup) into a deep 9" x 13" baking or casserole dish. Arrange the shells in rows, filling side up. Add the remaining marinara sauce to surround and lightly cover the shells. Top with 1 Cup grated mozzarella cheese and a sprinkle of parmesan cheese

Bake, covered, in a 375 degree oven for 25 minutes. Remove foil and bake for an additional 10-15 minutes, or until lightly browned and bubbly around the edges. Let rest 5-10 minutes before serving.