

Meat Loaf with Ricotta by Lidia Bastianich

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Ingredients:

1 cup milk
3 cups day-old bread, cubed, from a loaf of country bread
3 pounds ground beef
3 large eggs, beaten with a pinch of salt
1 pound fresh ricotta, drained, plus more for the sauce if you like
1 bunch scallions, finely chopped
½ cup Parmigiano-Reggiano, grated
¼ cup Italian parsley, chopped
½ teaspoon nutmeg
1 tablespoon kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
½ pound fresh mozzarella cut in 1/2-inch cubes
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
5 cups Tomato sauce, try using Lidia's Marinara Tomato Sauce

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Pour the milk over the bread cubes in a bowl, and let soak for a few minutes, until the bread is saturated. Squeeze the soft bread a handful at a time, pressing out as much milk as you can (discard milk, or give it to a pet), then tear bread into small shreds and toss back into the bowl. Crumble the ground beef into the bowl, and add the eggs, ricotta, scallions, grated cheese, parsley, nutmeg, salt, and pepper. Fold and toss everything together, and squeeze the mixture a few times between your fingers to distribute all the ingredients evenly. Scatter the mozzarella cubes on top, and fold and mush them throughout the loaf mix.

Brush a roasting pan with 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Gather the meat mixture in the bowl, turn it into the pan, and shape it into a fat oval loaf. Drizzle with the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil. Cover the pan with foil and bake 45 minutes.

Remove the foil, and continue to bake until the meatloaf is browned all over and completely cooked through, another 1 hour and 30 minutes or so. Remove the roast from the oven, and let it rest for about 10 minutes.

Heat the tomato sauce to a simmer in a saucepan as the meat rests. Turn off the heat, and, if you like, stir 1/2 cup or so fresh ricotta into the sauce. Cut the loaf crosswise in the pan or on a cutting board, in slices as thick as you like. Serve on warm dinner plates, topped with a spoonful or two of sauce, and pass more sauce at the table (or, for family-style serving, arrange the slices on a warm platter, topped with some of the sauce). To accompany this meatloaf, I love braised broccoli rabe or escarole, served on a separate plate or platter. Note: If you love fresh ricotta, as I do, you can stir some into the tomato sauce, too, just before serving the meatloaf.