

Spinach & Ricotta Stuffed Shells in a Spicy Sausage Sauce

INGREDIENTS

For the Stuffed Shells

- 18-20 jumbo pasta shells, boil extra in case some break
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 cups spinach, roughly chopped
- 15 ounces Ricotta
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- 3 cups mozzarella cheese, shredded and divided
- ½ tsp Salt
- ¼ tsp pepper
- ½ teaspoon dried basil
- ½ teaspoon dried parsley
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 egg
- Fresh parsley and Parmesan, to garnish

For the Sauce

- 24 ounces marinara sauce (I like to use Rao's)
- 1 lb hot Italian sausage
- 1 ½ teaspoon fennel seeds
- Zest one lemon

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. Boil shells in salted water for 1 minute less than al dente and set a timer to avoid overcooking them. Drain once cooked, separate, and set aside.
3. Meanwhile, cook sausage in a large skillet over medium heat according to package direction, for about 10 minutes. Add the fennel seeds and cook for 1 minute more. Remove the sausage from the pan while keeping the drippings to use instead of oil.
4. Add garlic to the pan and cook for 1 minute. Add the spinach and toss to coat. Cook for about 3 minutes or until the spinach is wilted. Set aside and let cool.
5. Place the ricotta in a large bowl and add the seasonings. Stir to combine. Add *half* of the mozzarella cheese and most of the Parmesan, (you may want to reserve a little Parmesan to sprinkle over the top before baking.) along with the egg and stir to combine. Fold in the cooled spinach and garlic.

6. Add the sausage back to the pan with the marinara sauce and lemon zest. Cook on to heat through. Once heated, add the sauce to the bottom of a 9 x 13-inch casserole dish (or a round 12-inch oven-safe skillet). Use a spoon to fill each pasta shell with the cheese mixture and place it in the baking dish.
7. Top with remaining mozzarella cheese and Parmesan.
8. Cover and bake for 20 minutes. Remove the cover and bake for 10 more minutes. Garnish with fresh parsley and Parmesan.