

# Creamy Italian Zuppa Toscana Soup

## Creamy Italian Zuppa Toscana Soup

Whenever the weather turns chilly, I can't resist making a big pot of soup. Over the years, I've made so many different kinds, both at home and in my restaurants, but this Zuppa Toscana has always been a favorite. Back when we were running our kitchens, soup was something I loved to feature because it brought people together – simple, comforting, and always changing with the season.

This version is one I make often for my family now. The smoky pancetta adds incredible depth, the sausage gives it that classic Italian heartiness, and the mix of kale and spinach reminds me of the rustic soups I grew up with. It's the kind of recipe that feels familiar yet special every time I serve it. And just like in the restaurant days, I can never resist pairing it with a warm loaf of crusty bread for dipping – because for me, that's where the comfort really begins.

## Things to know about this Creamy Italian Zuppa Toscana Soup

- **Greens:** I like to use both kale and spinach – the kale holds up beautifully in the simmering broth, and the spinach adds a touch of delicate freshness. If you only have one on hand, either works fine.
- **Sausage:** Mild or spicy Italian sausage is your choice. In the restaurants, we always used a mix to balance

flavors.

- **Pancetta:** Don't skip it! The little bites of pancetta add that smoky, salty depth that makes this soup taste like it's been simmering for hours.
- **Potatoes:** Thinly sliced potatoes cook quickly, but diced potatoes are great if you prefer chunkier bites.
- **Cream:** For a lighter version, I sometimes swap the heavy cream for half-and-half. It still gives that rich, cozy texture without feeling too heavy.
- **Serving suggestion:** Always serve with a warm slice of crusty bread or focaccia – it's how we did it in the restaurant, and it makes all the difference at home too.

### **Variation ideas:**

- Add a pinch of crushed red pepper for a little heat.
- Swap some of the potatoes for cannellini beans for extra protein.
- For a dairy-free option, use coconut milk instead of cream – it adds a subtle sweetness that pairs beautifully with the sausage.
- If you love this cozy Tuscan soup, try it alongside my creamy sausage tortellini soup or my classic Italian sausage risotto – both are perfect for a comforting meal any night of the week!”

## **Creamy Italian Zuppa Toscana Soup**

### **Cook Time & Servings**

- **Prep Time:** 10 minutes
- **Cook Time:** 30 minutes

- **Total Time:** 40 minutes

- **Servings:** 6

## Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
  - 4 oz pancetta, diced
  - 1 lb. Italian sausage (mild or spicy, casings removed)
  - 1 medium onion, finely chopped
  - 3 cloves garlic, minced
  - 4 medium russet potatoes, thinly sliced or diced
  - 6 cups chicken broth
  - 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (optional)
  - Salt & freshly ground black pepper, to taste
  - 3 cups chopped kale (stems removed)
  - 2 cups baby spinach
  - 1 cup heavy cream (or half-and-half for lighter)
  - Freshly grated Parmesan, for serving
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## Instructions

### 1. Cook pancetta & sausage:

In a large soup pot, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add pancetta and cook until golden and crisp. Add sausage, breaking it apart with a

spoon, and cook until browned.

**2. Sauté aromatics:**

Stir in onion and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook 1 minute more.

**3. Simmer potatoes:**

Add potatoes, chicken broth, red pepper flakes, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer 15–20 minutes, or until potatoes are tender.

**4. Add greens:**

Stir in kale and spinach; cook 3–4 minutes until wilted.

**5. Finish with cream:**

Lower heat, stir in heavy cream, and warm through without boiling. Adjust seasoning as needed.

**6. Serve:**

Ladle into bowls, sprinkle with Parmesan, and serve with crusty bread.

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# Italian Green Beans and Potato Salad

## Italian Green Beans and Potato Salad

There's something about the combination of fresh green beans

and tender potatoes that always takes me back to family gatherings and summer cookouts. This Italian-style salad is a dish I grew up eating, especially when green beans were plentiful in the garden and new potatoes were just dug up. Unlike creamy American-style potato salad, this version is light, bright, and dressed simply with olive oil, vinegar, garlic, and herbs. It's rustic, refreshing, and full of flavor – the kind of dish that tastes even better after it sits for a little while and the flavors have had a chance to mingle.

What I love most about this salad is its versatility. It's not just for summer picnics – it's perfect anytime of the year. In warmer months, it shines as a light side dish for grilled meats or seafood, while in cooler months, it pairs beautifully with roasted chicken, baked fish, or even a cozy Sunday roast.

## **Things to know about this Italian Green Beans and Potato Salad**

This salad tastes even better after a few hours in the fridge. The potatoes soak up the garlicky vinaigrette, and the green beans keep their crunch. Since it's made without mayo, it's perfect for picnics and potlucks, and it's just as welcome in the middle of summer as it is on a chilly autumn or winter day.

### **Variations to Try:**

- Add a handful of kalamata or green olives for a briny bite.
- Make it heartier with canned tuna or sliced hard-boiled eggs.
- Swap the parsley for fresh basil or mint.
- Use fresh lemon juice instead of vinegar for a brighter flavor.

**Love this recipe?** Be sure to check out my other Italian-inspired sides like **Italian crispy roasted potatoes** or Fuyu Persimmon Walnut Salad.

# Recipe: Italian Green Beans and Potato Salad

**Servings:** 6

**Cook Time:** 25 minutes

## Ingredients

- 1 pound baby potatoes (red or Yukon gold), halved or quartered
- 1 pound fresh green beans, trimmed
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/3 tablespoons red wine vinegar (or white wine vinegar)
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard (optional, for extra tang)
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes ( adjust to taste )
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

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## Instructions

1. **Cook the potatoes:** Place the potatoes in a large pot of

salted water. Bring to a boil and cook until just fork-tender, about 12–15 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove the potatoes and set aside, keeping the cooking water in the pot.

2. **Cook the green beans:** In the same pot of boiling water, add the trimmed green beans and cook for 3–4 minutes, until bright green and tender-crisp. Drain and plunge into a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking. Drain again.
  3. **Make the dressing:** In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, vinegar, garlic, mustard (if using), oregano, salt, and pepper.
  4. **Assemble the salad:** In a large serving bowl, combine the potatoes, green beans, and sliced red onion. Pour the dressing over the top and toss gently to coat.
  5. **Finish & serve:** Sprinkle with chopped parsley and adjust seasoning with more salt, pepper, or vinegar to taste. Serve warm, at room temperature, or chilled.
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# **Spicy Italian Sausage cannellini Bean Soup**

# Spicy Italian Sausage cannellini Bean Soup

There's something about a bowl of soup that instantly feels like home. Growing up, my mom always had a pot of beans simmering on the stove, filling the kitchen with the smell of garlic, herbs, and tomatoes. In my restaurants, we often served comforting Italian classics, but I loved giving them a little twist—like adding spicy sausage to a simple bean soup to give it warmth and depth. This spicy Italian sausage and cannellini bean soup in a rich tomato broth is one of those recipes that's both hearty and approachable. It's perfect for weeknight dinners when you want something satisfying but easy, yet it's fancy enough to serve when friends or family come over. Every spoonful is a reminder of the flavors of my childhood, with a little Italian restaurant flair.

## Things to know about this Spicy Italian Sausage cannellini Bean Soup

- I always recommend soaking dried cannellini beans overnight—it makes them cook faster and gives the soup a creamier texture. I remember in my restaurants, we would sometimes slow-cook beans for hours, but soaking first always saved time without sacrificing flavor.
- This soup tastes even better the next day. If you make it ahead, the flavors meld beautifully, just like the soups we served in the restaurant that kept customers coming back.
- For a slightly thicker, creamier soup, mash a few beans against the side of the pot before serving. It's a trick I picked up from my mother-in-law's kitchen—simple but

adds so much texture.

- Don't forget a drizzle of high-quality olive oil and a sprinkle of fresh parsley before serving—it adds brightness and a restaurant-style finish.

### ▪ **Variations**

- **Greens for color and nutrition:** Stir in chopped kale, spinach, or escarole at the end for extra color and vitamins. I often did this in my restaurants to make the soup feel fresh and seasonal.
- **Extra heat:** Add more crushed red pepper flakes or a pinch of cayenne if you love spicy food. A little kick makes it cozy on cold evenings.
- **Hearty version:** Toss in small pasta shapes like ditalini or orzo to turn the soup into a filling one-pot meal. Perfect for serving hungry friends or family.
- **Cheese finish:** Top each bowl with shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano for richness and a touch of Italian elegance. In my restaurants, this always felt like the finishing touch that made customers smile.
- **Broth twist:** For a deeper flavor, simmer the soup with a splash of white wine before adding the tomatoes—a trick I learned from years of playing with flavors in my kitchen.
- Love hearty Italian soups? Try my Italian escarole and beans with sausage for another comforting classic, or warm up with creamy sausage tortellini soup for a rich, flavorful meal.

## **Spicy Italian Sausage cannellini**

# Bean Soup

**Servings: 6–8**

**Cook Time: 2 hours (includes soaking and simmering)**

**Prep Time: 20 minutes**

## Ingredients

- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups dried cannellini beans (soaked overnight, drained)
- 1 lb spicy Italian sausage, casings removed
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 2 celery stalks, finely chopped
- 2 carrots, finely chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 (14 oz) cans crushed tomatoes
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 cups water (plus more as needed)
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 1 tsp crushed red pepper flakes (optional, adjust to taste)
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- 2 tbsp olive oil

- Fresh parsley, chopped (for garnish)

## Instructions

1. **Prep the beans:** Soak dried cannellini beans overnight in plenty of water. Drain and rinse before using.
  2. **Cook the sausage:** In a large pot or Dutch oven, heat 1 tbsp olive oil over medium heat. Add sausage, breaking it into bite-sized pieces, and cook until browned. Remove sausage and set aside.
  3. **Make the soffritto:** In the same pot, add remaining olive oil. Sauté onions, celery, and carrots until softened, about 5–7 minutes. Add garlic and cook 1 minute more.
  4. **Combine ingredients:** Return sausage to the pot. Add crushed tomatoes, soaked beans, broth, water, oregano, thyme, and red pepper flakes. Stir to combine.
  5. **Simmer:** Bring soup to a boil, then reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer gently for 1 ½ to 2 hours, or until beans are tender. Stir occasionally and add more water or broth if needed to reach your desired consistency.
  6. **Season:** Taste and adjust salt and pepper as needed.
  7. **Serve:** Ladle into bowls and garnish with chopped parsley and a drizzle of olive oil. Top with grated Parmigiano-Reggiano if desired.
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# Italian Sausage and Mushroom Pasta

## Italian sausage and mushroom pasta

This rustic **Italian sausage and mushroom pasta** is the kind of dish that brings the warmth of an Italian countryside kitchen right to your table. Savory sausage, earthy mushrooms, and sweet onions are simmered in a tomato-based sauce, then tossed with pasta and finished with parmesan. The addition of reserved pasta water ties everything together into a silky, flavorful sauce.

It's an easy, one-pan pasta dinner perfect for fall weeknights—or for serving family-style on a Sunday.

## Things to know about this Italian Sausage and Mushroom Pasta

- **Pasta Choices:** This recipe works beautifully with short pasta shapes that hold the sauce well, like rigatoni, penne, or orecchiette. If you prefer long noodles, try tagliatelle or pappardelle for a more elegant touch.
- **Mushroom Varieties:** Cremini or button mushrooms are great, but mixing in porcini, shiitake, or chanterelles will give the sauce a deeper, earthier flavor. Dried porcini can be rehydrated and added to boost umami.
- **Tomatoes:** Crushed tomatoes give a rustic texture, but you could also use passata (tomato purée) for a smoother

sauce, or whole San Marzano tomatoes hand-crushed for a traditional Italian feel.

- **Herbs:** Fresh thyme and oregano add depth, but rosemary or sage bring more autumn warmth. For brightness, finish with fresh basil or parsley.
- **Cheese Options:** Parmesan is classic, but Pecorino Romano adds a saltier, sharper edge. For extra indulgence, a spoonful of ricotta on top before serving makes it creamy without heavy cream.
- **Spice Level:** Mild sausage keeps it family-friendly, while spicy Italian sausage adds a kick. You can also toss in a pinch of red pepper flakes to heat things up.
- **Make It Meat-Free:** Skip the sausage and bulk up with more mushrooms or add lentils for protein.
- **Veggie Add-Ins:** Spinach, kale, or roasted red peppers fold in beautifully for extra nutrition and color.
- **Meal Prep Friendly:** This pasta reheats well the next day, and the flavors deepen as the sauce sits. Just reserve a splash of pasta water when reheating to keep it sauce

If you loved this recipe, you'll also enjoy my Meatball Sunday Sauce, , or Sausage & Lentil pasta

## **Ingredients (4 servings | 30 minutes)**

- 12 oz pasta (rigatoni, penne, or orecchiette work best)
- 1 lb Italian sausage (mild or spicy, casings removed)

- 10 oz mushrooms (cremini, button, or a mix), sliced
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup dry white wine
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 1 14 oz. can crushed tomatoes
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup grated parmesan cheese
- 1 tsp oregano
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- Fresh parsley, for garnish

## Instructions

1. **Cook the pasta:** Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook pasta until al dente. Reserve 1 cup of pasta water, then drain.
2. **Brown the sausage:** In a large skillet, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Add sausage, breaking it up with a spoon, and cook until browned, 5–6 minutes. Remove and set aside.
3. **Sauté the aromatics:** In the same skillet, add onion and cook until softened, about 3 minutes. Stir in garlic and mushrooms; cook until mushrooms release their juices and begin to brown, 6–7 minutes.
4. **Deglaze:** Pour in the white wine, scraping up any browned bits from the pan. Simmer until reduced by half.

5. **Make the sauce:** Stir in crushed tomatoes, reserved sausage, thyme, salt, and pepper. Simmer for 10 minutes.
  6. **Finish with pasta:** Add cooked pasta to the skillet, along with 1 cup reserved pasta water. Toss everything together until the sauce coats the pasta.
  7. **Serve:** Stir in parmesan cheese, garnish with parsley, and serve hot.
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# Italian Spiced Lentil Soup

## Title with Recipe Name in it

There's nothing quite like a bowl of lentil soup to warm you from the inside out. This Italian spiced lentil soup takes the comforting rustic style of Italian cooking and layers it with warm, fragrant spices. The result is a simple yet deeply flavorful soup that feels both familiar and a little unexpected.

Instead of the usual tomato and vegetable base, this recipe leans on cumin, coriander, ginger, chili powder, and a hint of cinnamon to give the lentils a cozy depth of flavor. Olive oil, fresh greens, and a drizzle of finishing oil keep it rooted in Italian tradition. It's the kind of soup that makes your kitchen smell amazing while it simmers and tastes even better with a slice of crusty bread or focaccia on the side.

# Things to know about this Italian spiced lentil soup

- **Yellow lentils cook faster** than green or brown lentils and create a naturally creamy consistency—almost like a light purée.
- **Storage tip:** This soup thickens as it sits. Add a splash of broth or water when reheating to bring it back to the perfect texture.
- **Spice balance:** The cinnamon adds warmth without making it sweet—it balances beautifully with the cumin and chili powder.
- **Finishing touch:** For an extra burst of flavor, drizzle the soup with your topping made from **olive oil, chili powder, and fresh parsley**. It adds color, heat, and freshness all in one spoonful.
- If you love cozy bowls like this **Italian Spiced Lentil Soup**, you'll also enjoy:
  - Creamy Italian Bean and Parmesan Soup
  - Split Pea Soup with Ham
  - Classic Italian Wedding Soup

## Italian Spiced Lentil Soup

### Servings & Time

- **Servings:** 4
- **Prep Time:** 10 minutes

- **Cook Time:** 20 minutes
- **Total Time:** 30 minutes

## Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 cups dried red, yellow or brown lentils, rinsed
- 6 cups vegetable or chicken broth
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon salt (or to taste)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cups chopped spinach or escarole (optional)
- Fresh parsley, chopped (for garnish)
- Drizzle of olive oil mixed with freshly chopped parsley for finishing

# Instructions

1. Heat olive oil in a large pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add onion and salt cook until soft and golden, about 5 minutes.
2. Stir in garlic, cumin, coriander, ginger, chili powder, and cinnamon. Cook for 1–2 minutes until fragrant.
3. Add lentils, broth, bay leaves, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer uncovered until lentils are tender, about 25-30 minutes.
4. Remove bay leaves. for a smoother consistency use a whisk to mix for a few minutes. Stir in spinach or escarole (if using) and cook for 2–3 minutes until wilted.
5. Adjust seasoning as needed.
6. Serve hot, garnished with the olive oil mix

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## **Italian Braised Short Ribs with Red Wine Sauce**

## **Italian Braised Short Ribs**

# with Red Wine Sauce

When the cooler weather sets in, I always find myself reaching for those slow-cooked, comforting dishes that fill the kitchen with warmth and incredible aromas. In Italy, fall and winter are the seasons of braises—hearty cuts of meat simmered low and slow with wine, herbs, and vegetables until they become tender enough to fall off the bone. This style of cooking is especially popular in Northern Italy, where rich red wines like Barolo, Chianti, or Montepulciano are often used to deepen the flavor of the sauce.

These Italian Braised Short Ribs in Red Wine Sauce are a perfect example of that rustic tradition. The beef slowly soaks up all the earthy flavors of garlic, rosemary, thyme, and a bold red wine, creating a sauce that's every bit as comforting as it is elegant. It's the kind of meal that feels special enough for company but also works beautifully as a Sunday family dinner—especially served over creamy polenta, mashed potatoes, or wide ribbons of pappardelle to catch every last drop of the sauce.

## Things to know about this Italian Braised Short Ribs with Red Wine Sauce

- **Best wine to use:** Always cook with a wine you'd enjoy drinking. Italian reds like Barolo, Chianti, or Montepulciano give the sauce depth, but any good dry red will work.
- **Make-ahead friendly:** Braised short ribs taste even better the next day as the flavors deepen. You can cook them a day ahead, then gently reheat before serving.
- **Serving suggestions:** The Italian way is to pair braised

meats with creamy polenta or wide pappardelle pasta, but mashed potatoes or crusty bread for dipping are just as delicious.

- **Leftovers:** Shred leftover short rib meat and use it as a rich ragu over pasta or tucked into a hearty panini.
- **Cooking tip:** Keep the heat low and slow—this style of Italian braise is all about patience, letting the wine and herbs transform the meat into something truly tender.
- Looking for more cozy Italian comfort food? Try my **creamy Italian sausage risotto** for another hearty fall dinner, or my Spicy Italian sausage gnocchi soup. And if you love cooking with wine, you won't want to miss my **bone-in pork chop piccata** for a quick weeknight favorite.

## Italian Braised Short Ribs with Red Wine Sauce

### Servings

4–6

### Cook Time

- Prep: 20 minutes
- Cook: 3 hours
- Total: ~3 hours 20 minutes

### Ingredients

- 3–4 lbs bone-in beef short ribs

- Salt & freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 2 cups dry Italian red wine (Barolo, Chianti, or Montepulciano)
- 2 cups beef stock
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 bay leaves

## Instructions

1. **Season & sear the short ribs:** Pat ribs dry and season generously with salt and pepper. In a large Dutch oven, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Sear ribs on all sides until deep brown, about 3–4 minutes per side. Transfer to a plate.
2. **Sauté the aromatics:** In the same pot, add onion, carrots, and celery. Cook 5–6 minutes until softened. Add garlic and tomato paste, stirring for 1 minute until fragrant.
3. **Deglaze with wine:** Pour in the red wine, scraping up browned bits from the bottom. Simmer 5 minutes

to reduce slightly.

4. **Add stock & herbs:** Stir in beef stock, rosemary, thyme, bay leaves, and porcini mushrooms (if using). Return short ribs (and any juices) to the pot. The liquid should come about halfway up the ribs—add more stock if needed.
5. **Braise low & slow:** Cover and cook at **325°F (160°C) in the oven for 2½–3 hours**, until the meat is fork-tender and falling off the bone.
6. **Finish the sauce:** Remove ribs to a platter and cover. Discard herb stems and bay leaves. Skim off excess fat from the sauce, then simmer uncovered for 5–10 minutes until slightly thickened. Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper.
7. **Serve:** Spoon sauce over the short ribs and serve with creamy polenta, mashed potatoes, or wide pappardelle pasta.

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## **Creamy Italian Bean and Parmesan Soup**

## **Creamy Italian Bean and Parmesan Soup**

There's nothing more comforting than a big pot of soup simmering away on the stove, especially when it's creamy,

hearty, and packed with flavor. This **Creamy Italian Bean and Parmesan Soup with Spinach** is one of those recipes you'll want to keep on repeat. It's simple, nourishing, and comes together in under an hour – perfect for busy weeknights or cozy weekends at home.

The creamy base gets its richness from Parmesan and a touch of milk, while cannellini beans make it extra hearty. Fresh spinach stirred in at the end adds a pop of color and a boost of nutrition. Serve it with warm crusty bread, and you've got a comforting meal that feels rustic and homemade, just the way Italian food should.

## Things to Know about this creamy Italian bean and parmesan soup

- **Beans:** Cannellini beans are classic in Italian soups, but you can swap them with Great Northern or navy beans if that's what you have on hand.
- **Parmesan rind:** Don't skip this if you have one! It adds incredible depth and savoriness. If you don't, just add a little extra grated Parmesan at the end.
- **Milk or cream:** Whole milk makes this soup creamy without being too heavy, but half-and-half or even a splash of cream will give it extra richness.
- **Spinach substitute:** Kale, Swiss chard, or even arugula work beautifully if you want to mix it up. Just adjust the cooking time so greens are tender but still vibrant.
- **Blending tip:** Only blending half the soup gives you the best of both worlds – creaminess and texture. If you like it super smooth, blend the whole pot.
- **Serving suggestions:** Crusty bread is a must, but you can also top the soup with garlic croutons, a drizzle of

olive oil, or extra shaved Parmesan.

- **Storage:** This soup keeps well in the fridge for up to 3 days. Reheat gently on the stove, adding a splash of broth or milk if it thickens. Avoid freezing if you've used milk or cream, as the texture may change.
- If you love cozy Italian soups like this one, you'll want to try my **Creamy Sausage Tortellini Soup** next. And for a classic favorite, don't miss my comforting **Pasta e Fagioli** – perfect for keeping warm on chilly days!

## Ingredients

### • Creamy Italian Bean and Parmesan Soup

#### Ingredients (Serves 4–6)

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 14 oz. can crushed tomatoes
- 2 cans (15 oz each) cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 cup whole milk or half-and-half
- 1 Parmesan rind (optional, for depth of flavor)

- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus extra for serving
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 cups fresh spinach, roughly chopped
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped (for garnish)

## Instructions

1. **Sauté the base:** In a large pot, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add onion, carrots, and celery. Cook until softened, about 6–7 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook 1 more minute. Add the crushed tomatoes cook 5 minutes longer
2. **Add beans and broth:** Stir in beans, oregano, thyme, bay leaf, and Parmesan rind (if using). Pour in the broth and bring to a simmer. Cook uncovered for 15–20 minutes.
3. **Blend for creaminess:** Remove bay leaf and rind. Use an immersion blender to puree about half the soup, leaving some beans whole. (Or transfer a few cups to a blender and return to pot.)
4. **Finish with Parmesan & milk:** Stir in milk (or half-and-half) and Parmesan. Simmer gently for 5 minutes, stirring often, until creamy.
5. **Add spinach:** Stir in spinach and cook just until wilted, about 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.
6. **Serve:** Ladle into bowls, garnish with fresh parsley and

extra Parmesan, and serve with warm bread.

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# Butternut Squash Lasagna

## Butternut Squash Lasagna

Fall has always been my favorite time of year. There's just something about the crisp air, the changing leaves, and the way the kitchen feels cozier when something warm is baking in the oven. I especially love cooking with fall produce, and butternut squash is always at the top of my list. It's naturally sweet, roasts up beautifully, and makes the creamiest base for so many comforting dishes. This butternut squash lasagna is one of my favorites—it's layered with roasted squash, creamy ricotta, and plenty of cheese for the ultimate cozy dinner. It's the kind of meal that's perfect for a Sunday dinner with family or sharing around the table with friends

## Things to know about this butternut squash lasagna

- **Make-Ahead Friendly:** You can assemble the lasagna a day ahead, cover it tightly with foil, and refrigerate until ready to bake. Just add 10–15 extra minutes to the baking time.
- **Freezer Option:** This lasagna freezes beautifully! Bake it, let it cool completely, then wrap well and freeze for up to 3 months. Reheat covered at 350°F until warmed

through.

- **Cheese Swaps:** Ricotta is classic, but you can use cottage cheese for extra protein, or add fontina or Gruyère for a richer flavor.
- **Shortcuts:** Save time by buying pre-cut butternut squash or even frozen squash. No-boil lasagna noodles also make this recipe easier.
- **Add a Protein:** If you'd like, layer in Italian sausage, pancetta, or shredded chicken for a heartier version.
- And if you want to take this lasagna to the next level, try it with my **Easy Béchamel Sauce** recipe. It's quick to make and adds that extra creamy layer that makes this dish irresistible.
- **Serving Tip:** This lasagna pairs beautifully with a simple green salad and crusty bread for a complete fall dinner.

## • More Cozy Recipes to Try

If you love this Butternut Squash Lasagna, here are a few more comforting recipes you might enjoy:

- Classic Italian Wedding Soup – another hearty fall favorite.
- Creamy Butternut Squash Pasta with Gorgonzola – a quick 20-minute dinner with the same fall flavors.
- ☐ Italian Roasted Sausage, Potatoes, and Peppers – a cozy sheet pan dinner that's always a hit.
- ☐ Escarole and Beans with Italian Sausage – rustic, simple, and perfect with crusty bread.

# Butternut Squash Lasagna

## Servings & Time

- **Servings:** 8
  - **Prep Time:** 30 minutes
  - **Cook Time:** 50 minutes
  - **Total Time:** 1 hour 20 minutes
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## Ingredients

- 1 medium butternut squash (about 2  $\frac{1}{2}$ –3 lbs. ), peeled, seeded, and cubed
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp fresh thyme (or  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp dried)
- 1 tsp fresh sage, chopped (or  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp dried)
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- 2 cups ricotta cheese
- 1 large egg
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 cups béchamel (homemade or store-bought)
- 9 lasagna noodles (no-boil or cooked)

- Optional:  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp red pepper flakes for heat, crispy sage leaves for garnish
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## Instructions

### 1. Roast the Squash:

- Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C).
- Toss squash cubes with olive oil, garlic, thyme, sage, salt, and pepper.
- Spread on a baking sheet and roast for 25–30 minutes, until soft and caramelized.
- Mash lightly with a fork (leave a few chunks for texture).

### 2. Prepare the Cheese Mixture:

- In a bowl, mix ricotta, egg,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup mozzarella,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup Parmesan, salt, and pepper.

### 3. Assemble the Lasagna:

- Spread a thin layer of béchamel on the bottom of a 9×13-inch baking dish.
- Add noodles, a layer of mashed squash, dollops of ricotta mixture, a drizzle of béchamel, and a sprinkle of mozzarella.
- Repeat layers (about 3 total), finishing with noodles topped with béchamel, mozzarella, and remaining Parmesan.

### 4. Bake:

- Cover with foil and bake at 375°F (190°C) for 25 minutes.
- Remove foil and bake another 15–20 minutes until golden and bubbling.
- Let rest for 10 minutes before slicing.

#### 5. Serve:

- Garnish with crispy sage leaves or extra Parmesan.

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## Chicken Meatballs with Marry Me Orzo

## Chicken Meatballs with Marry Me Orzo

Tender chicken meatballs are always a hit at the dinner table, and when you pair them with creamy *Marry Me Orzo*, you've got the ultimate comfort meal. This dish brings together juicy baked chicken meatballs and orzo pasta simmered in a rich Parmesan and sun-dried tomato cream sauce. It's the kind of meal that feels special enough for date night yet easy enough for a weeknight family dinner.

The name "*Marry Me Orzo*" comes from the idea that the flavors are so irresistible, they just might win someone's heart. I love how the baked meatballs soak up the creamy sauce, making every bite flavorful and hearty. If you're looking for a one-

pan recipe that's simple, satisfying, and a little bit romantic, this is it.

## Things to Know About Chicken Meatballs with Marry Me Orzo

- **Bake, don't fry:** Baking the meatballs keeps them juicy without extra oil, and it's hands-off while you prepare the orzo.
- **Cream swap:** Heavy cream gives the sauce its velvety texture, but you can lighten it up with half-and-half or even whole milk (just simmer a little longer to thicken).
- **Cheese matters:** Freshly grated Parmesan melts more smoothly than pre-shredded, giving the sauce that silky finish.
- **Customize the spice:** Red pepper flakes add a gentle kick—use more if you like a little heat, or leave them out for a milder dish.
- **Make it ahead:** The meatballs can be baked in advance and refrigerated (up to 3 days) or frozen (up to 3 months). Add them to the orzo to reheat.
- **Serving ideas:** This dish is filling on its own, but it pairs beautifully with a crisp green salad or roasted vegetables.
- **Storage tips:** Leftovers keep well in the fridge for 2–3 days. Reheat gently on the stove with a splash of broth or cream to loosen the sauce.
- If you loved these **Chicken Meatballs with Marry Me Orzo**, you'll also enjoy other comforting Italian favorites: try my Shrimp Marry Me Orzo for a seafood twist, or cozy

up with Creamy Sausage Tortellini Soup for a hearty weeknight dinner.

# Chicken Meatballs with Marry Me Orzo

## Ingredients

**Yield:** 4 servings

**Prep Time:** 15 minutes

**Cook Time:** 25 minutes

**Total Time:** 40 minutes

### • For the Chicken Meatballs

- 1 lb ground chicken
- 1 large egg
- 1 cup breadcrumbs
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp onion, grated or finely minced
- 2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
- salt and pepper to taste

### • For the Marry Me Orzo

- 2 cups orzo pasta
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sun-dried tomatoes, chopped

- 3 cups chicken broth (plus more if needed)
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 tsp red pepper flakes (adjust to taste)
- 1 tsp fresh thyme (or  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp dried)
- 2 cups baby spinach (optional)
- Salt & black pepper, to taste

## Instructions

### 1. Bake the Meatballs:

Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a mixing bowl, combine ground chicken, egg, breadcrumbs, Parmesan, garlic, onion, parsley, salt, and pepper. Mix until just combined and roll into about 18–20 small meatballs.

Place on the prepared baking sheet and bake for 18–20 minutes, until cooked through and lightly golden.

### 2. Start the Orzo:

While the meatballs bake, heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and sun-dried tomatoes, sautéing for 1–2 minutes. Stir in the orzo and toast lightly.

### 3. Simmer the Sauce:

Pour in chicken broth and heavy cream. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until the orzo is al dente and creamy, about 10–12 minutes. Add more broth as needed to keep it saucy.

### 4. Finish the Dish:

Stir in Parmesan, red pepper flakes, thyme, salt, and pepper. Add the baked meatballs to the skillet and simmer for 2–3 minutes so the flavors meld.

**5. Add Spinach & Serve:**

Stir in baby spinach (if using) until wilted. Garnish with extra Parmesan and parsley. Serve immediately.

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## **Italian Beef and Farro Soup**

## **Italian Beef and Farro Soup**

When the air turns crisp and the leaves start to fall, there's nothing better than a warm, hearty soup to bring everyone to the table. This **Italian Beef and Farro Soup** was a favorite in our restaurant's fall menu—rich, rustic, and packed with flavor. Tender cubes of sirloin simmer alongside sweet carrots, celery, and aromatic herbs in a savory tomato and beef broth, while pearled farro adds a nutty, chewy texture that makes every bite satisfying. It's the kind of soup that warms both the kitchen and the heart, perfect for a cozy weeknight or a Sunday dinner with family.

## **Things to know about this Italian Beef and Farro Soup**

- **What is farro?**

Farro is an ancient Italian grain with a nutty flavor and chewy texture. It's a staple in Tuscan cooking and makes soups hearty without feeling heavy.

- **Can I substitute farro?**

Yes! If you don't have farro, barley works beautifully. Rice or small pasta can be used too, but they'll change the texture.

- **Best cut of beef:**

Sirloin works wonderfully here because it stays tender in a shorter simmer. You can also use stew meat, chuck, or even leftover roast beef.

- **Make-ahead friendly:**

This soup tastes even better the next day as the flavors develop. Farro holds up better than pasta, so it won't turn mushy.

- **Freezer tip:**

Freeze in portions without adding the parsley and Parmesan. Add those fresh when reheating for the best flavor.

- **Serving suggestion:**

A drizzle of good olive oil, a sprinkle of Parmesan, and warm crusty bread make this a complete meal

- **Craving more comforting Italian dishes?**

Try these reader favorites:

- [Mama's best Italian Meatballs](#)
- [Classic Italian Wedding Soup](#)

## Ingredients

- **Ingredients (serves 4–6)**

- 1 pound sirloin, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 can (14.5 oz) diced tomatoes
- 6 cups beef broth
- 1 teaspoon fresh rosemary, chopped (or  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon dried)
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup pearled farro
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup fresh parsley, chopped
- Freshly grated Parmesan, for serving

## Instructions

1. **Brown the beef:** Heat olive oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add sirloin cubes and sear on all sides until browned. Remove and set aside.
2. **Sauté vegetables:** In the same pot, add onion, carrots, and celery. Cook until softened, about 5–6 minutes. Add garlic and cook 1 more minute.
3. **Build the soup base:** Return the beef to the pot. Stir in diced tomatoes, beef broth, thyme, and rosemary. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 25–30 minutes until the beef is tender.
4. **Cook the farro:** Add the farro and simmer for another 20–25 minutes until the farro is tender but chewy. Stir

occasionally and add a bit more broth or water if needed.

5. **Season and finish:** Taste and adjust salt and pepper. Stir in fresh parsley just before serving.
6. **Serve:** Ladle into bowls, sprinkle with Parmesan, and enjoy with crusty Italian bread.