

Creamy Italian Mac and Cheese Bake

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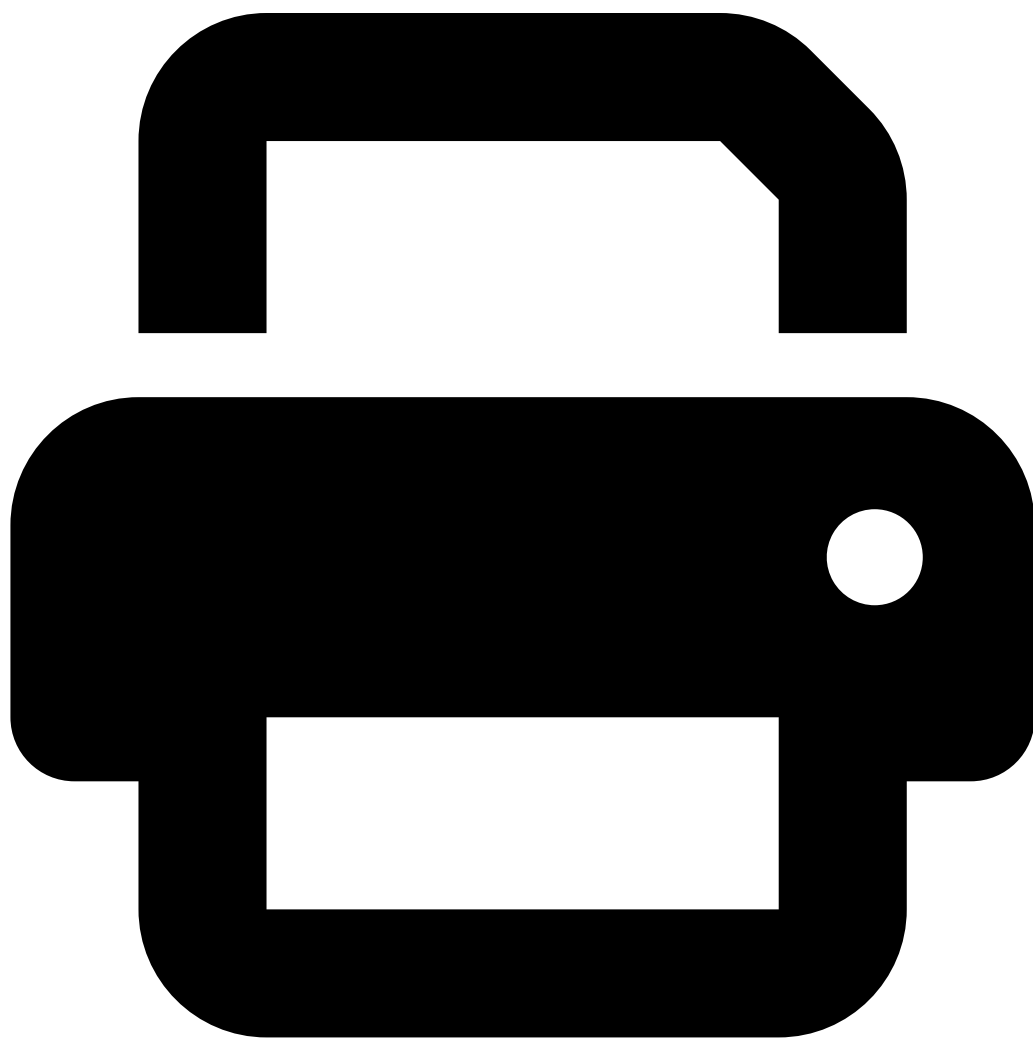
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There's something so comforting about a bubbling dish of mac and cheese coming out of the oven – golden, creamy, and impossibly cheesy. But in our Italian home, even the most classic dishes tend to take on a Mediterranean twist. This **Creamy Italian Mac and Cheese Bake** is my way of giving a familiar American favorite a little Italian soul – rich with Fontina, sharp cheddar, mozzarella, and plenty of Parmesan. It's a dish that feels right at home on any holiday table, especially Thanksgiving.

Growing up, mac and cheese wasn't something we made often. My mom would serve baked pasta dishes layered with cheese and béchamel, but I didn't truly fall in love with mac and cheese until years later, when I realized how easily it could be made the Italian way. One Thanksgiving, after too many side dishes that felt the same, I wanted something creamy and comforting that still fit our family's table – something with the coziness of pasta al forno and the nostalgia of childhood

comfort food. This recipe was born that day, and now it's a staple every year.

The base starts with a simple roux, but instead of plain butter, I melt it with a bit of diced pancetta or prosciutto – just enough to give the sauce a salty, savory depth. The fat renders into the butter, infusing the whole dish with that unmistakable Italian aroma. Then comes the magic: Fontina for smoothness, sharp cheddar for bite, mozzarella for stretch, and Parmesan for that nutty, salty finish.

When it bakes, the top turns crisp and golden while the inside stays luxuriously creamy. It's comfort food through and through – a little rustic, a little elegant, and completely irresistible. On Thanksgiving, it's the first dish to disappear from our table, and I can promise it'll become one of your family's favorite too!!!

Things to know about this Creamy Italian Mac and Cheese Bake

One of my favorite things about this Creamy Italian Mac and Cheese Bake is how easy it is to customize. I love using Fontina, cheddar, mozzarella, and Parmesan, but Asiago, Provolone, or even a little Gorgonzola are delicious options too.

This recipe is perfect for entertaining because you can assemble it a day ahead and refrigerate it until you're ready to bake. Just pop it in the oven until it's hot, bubbly, and golden.

For a vegetarian version, simply leave out the pancetta and add sautéed mushrooms or roasted butternut squash. Whether it's part of your holiday table or a cozy family dinner, this creamy baked pasta is always a crowd-pleaser.

Craving more comforting Italian classics? Try my Spinach and

Mushroom Lasagna with Béchamel Sauce, Roasted Butternut Squash Gnocchi, or Creamy Italian Sausage Risotto next – each one made to warm your heart and your kitchen.

Italian Mac and Cheese bake



This Italian Mac and Cheese Bake is the ultimate comfort food, combining tender pasta with a rich, creamy blend of Italian cheeses and a golden, bubbly topping. Made with Fontina, mozzarella, cheddar, and Parmesan, every bite is smooth, cheesy, and full of flavor. It's an easy family-friendly casserole that's perfect for weeknight dinners, holidays, or potlucks.

- 1 Lb. pounds **short pasta** (cavatappi, shells, or elbow macaroni)
- 3 Tbsp. **unsalted butter**
- 3 oz. **prosciutto or pancetta**
- 3 **all-purpose flour**
- 2 cups **whole milk**
- 1 cup **heavy cream**
- 1 cup **shredded Fontina cheese**
- 1 cup **shredded sharp cheddar cheese**
- 1 cup **shredded mozzarella cheese**
- 1/2 cup **grated Parmesan cheese**, divided
- 2 cloves **garlic** minced

- 1 tsp. **fresh thyme leaves** (or $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp dried)
- pinch of **nutmeg** (optional)
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

Crispy topping

- 1 cup Italian seasoned breadcrumbs
- 1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese
- 1 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil

1. Cook the pasta:

Boil in a large stock pot in salted water until *just al dente*. Drain and set aside.

2. Cook the pancetta/prosciutto:

In a large saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Add diced pancetta or prosciutto and cook until lightly crisp and the fat has rendered, about 3–4 minutes.

3. Build the roux:

Stir in the minced garlic and cook 30 seconds. Sprinkle in the flour and whisk for 1 minute, letting it absorb the butter and drippings.

4. Make the sauce:

Gradually pour in the milk and cream while whisking constantly until smooth and slightly thickened, about 4–5 minutes.

5. Add the cheeses:

Lower the heat and stir in Fontina, cheddar, mozzarella, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Parmesan until melted and creamy.

Season with thyme, nutmeg (if using), salt, and pepper.

6. Combine:

Add the cooked pasta to the sauce and stir until well coated.

7. Prepare the topping:

Mix breadcrumbs with Parmesan and olive oil.

8. Bake:

Pour the pasta mixture into a buttered 9×13-inch baking dish. Sprinkle evenly with the breadcrumb topping.

Bake at **375°F (190°C)** for **40–45 minutes**, until bubbly and golden brown.

Main Course

Italian

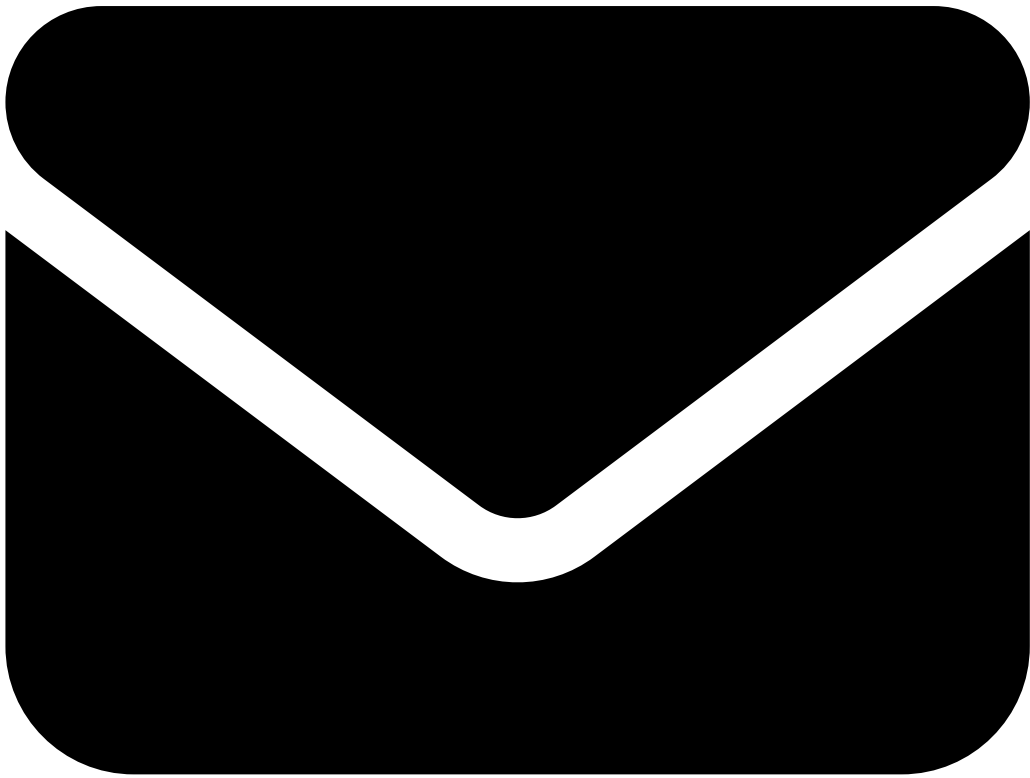
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Lasagna Bolognese with Béchamel Sauce

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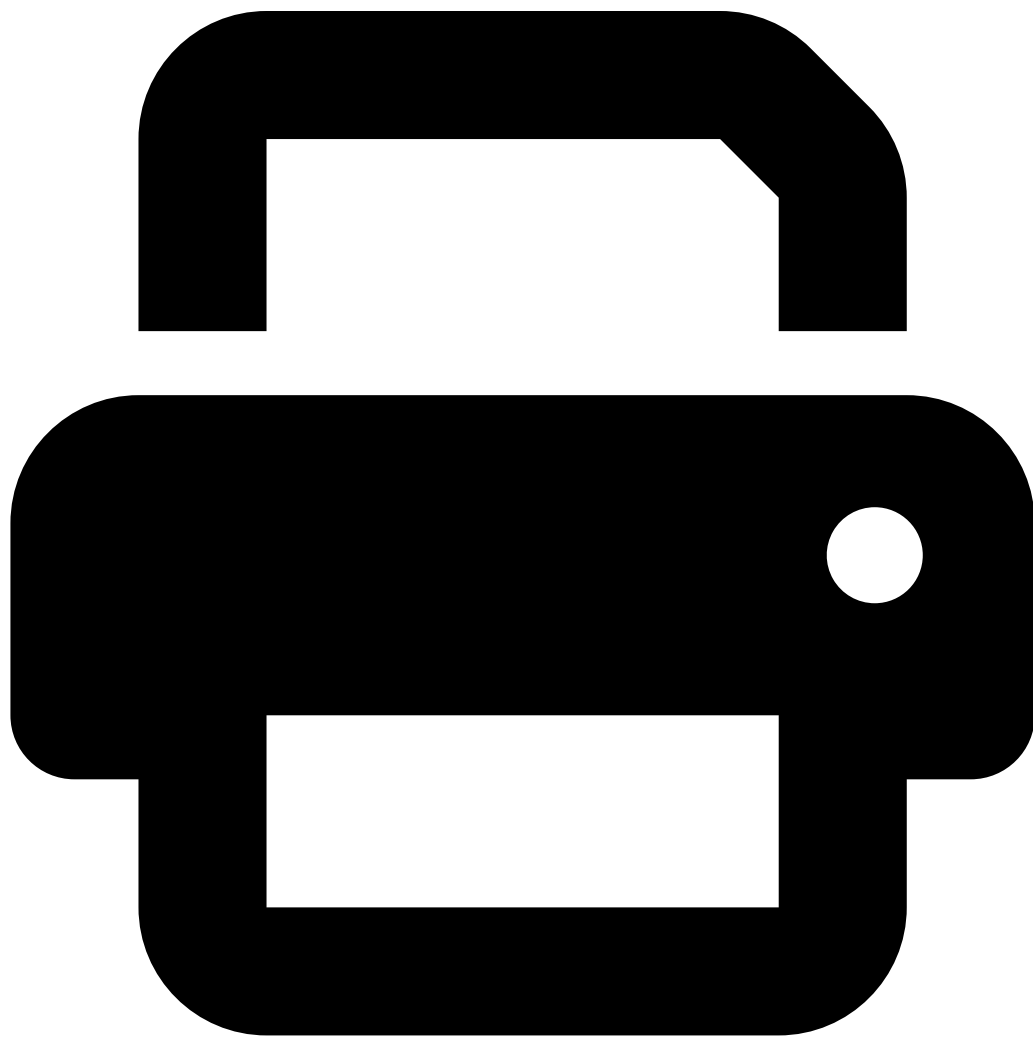
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Few dishes capture the heart of Italian comfort food quite like Lasagna Bolognese. With its rich layers of meat sauce, creamy béchamel, and perfectly melted cheese, this classic meal is a labor of love that never fails to impress. My version keeps the process simple – using store-bought noodles and homemade Bolognese sauce – while still delivering that authentic, slow-simmered flavor that makes every bite unforgettable. Whether for a cozy family dinner or a Sunday gathering, this lasagna is always a crowd-pleaser.

Things to know about this Lasagna Bolognese with Béchamel Sauce recipe

- **Make ahead:** You can assemble the lasagna a day in advance and refrigerate it until ready to bake.

- **Freezer-friendly:** Lasagna freezes beautifully – just wrap it tightly and freeze for up to 3 months.
- **Noodles:** No-boil noodles work well here, but if you prefer, parboil traditional lasagna sheets for a softer texture.
- **Sauce matters:** A rich, slow-cooked Bolognese sauce makes all the difference. If you've made extra, freeze it for your next batch.
- **Rest before slicing:** Let the lasagna sit for 15–20 minutes after baking to set the layers and make clean slices.
- **Craving more Italian comfort food?** Try my Meatball Sunday Sauce or cozy up with a bowl of Zuppa Toscana next. And if you love baked pasta, don't miss my hearty Easy cheesy Stuffed Shell – all perfect for your next family meal!

Lasagna Bolognese with Béchamel Sauce



This **Lasagna Bolognese with Béchamel Sauce** is a classic Italian masterpiece made with layers of rich slow-simmered meat sauce, silky béchamel, tender pasta sheets, and Parmesan

cheese. Unlike the American-style version made with ricotta, this traditional Northern Italian lasagna from Emilia-Romagna gets its luxurious creaminess from a smooth white sauce that perfectly balances the hearty Bolognese. It's a true labor of love, but every layer is worth the time for a comforting dish perfect for family gatherings, holidays, and special occasions.

For the Bolognese Sauce (You'll need about 4–5 cups of prepared Bolognese sauce.)

- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 1/2 lb. lean ground beef
- 1/2 lb. ground pork
- 1 cup each chopped onion+ carrots + celery
- 2 Tbsp. minced garlic
- 1 cup red wine
- 1 28 oz. can crushed tomatoes
- 2 cups beef broth
- 1 cup whole milk
- pinch of nutmeg
- Grated parmesan and Italian parsley for serving

For the Béchamel Sauce

- 4 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 4 Tbsp. all-purpose flour
- 4 cups whole milk, warmed
- 1/3 Tsp. ground nutmeg
- Salt and pepper to taste

Lasagna Noodles

Make the Bolognese sauce

1. **Build the flavor base:**Heat olive oil and butter in a large Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat. Add finely diced onion, carrot, and celery (*soffritto*)

and cook for 5–7 minutes until softened and fragrant

2. **Brown the meat:** Add ground beef and ground pork, breaking it apart with a wooden spoon. Cook until the meat is browned and most of the moisture has evaporated. Season with salt and pepper.
3. **Add the aromatics and wine:** Stir in garlic and cook briefly until fragrant. Add the wine and simmer until it has reduced, allowing the flavor to concentrate.
4. **Simmer the sauce:** Add crushed tomatoes, tomato paste, and herbs. Lower the heat and let the sauce gently simmer, partially covered, for **1½–2 hours**, stirring occasionally. A traditional Bolognese is slow-cooked until rich, thick, and deeply flavorful.
5. **Finish the sauce:** Stir in milk during the final 15–20 minutes of cooking to mellow the acidity of the tomatoes and create the signature silky texture of a Northern Italian Bolognese sauce. Taste and adjust seasoning before assembling the lasagna.
6. **Prepare the Bechamel sauce**
7. In a saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat.
8. Whisk in the flour and cook for 1–2 minutes until slightly golden.
9. Gradually whisk in the warm milk, stirring constantly until smooth and thickened, about 5–7 minutes.
10. Season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Set aside.

Cook the Lasagna Noodles

1. If using regular noodles, cook in salted boiling water until just al dente.

2. Drain and lay flat on a lightly oiled surface to prevent sticking.
3. If using no-boil noodles, skip this step.

Assemble the Lasagna

1. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. Lightly grease a 9×13-inch baking dish.
3. Spread a thin layer of Bolognese sauce on the bottom.
4. Add a layer of noodles.
5. Spread a layer of béchamel, then a layer of Bolognese, followed by a sprinkle of mozzarella and Parmesan.
6. Repeat the process ending with a layer of béchamel.

Bake

1. Cover with foil (tent it slightly so it doesn't touch the cheese).
2. Bake for 30 minutes.
3. Uncover and bake another 15 minutes, or until bubbly and golden on top.

Rest and Serve

1. Let the lasagna rest 20–30 minutes before cutting , this helps the layers set beautifully.
2. Slice and serve warm with extra Parmesan if desired.
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Main Course

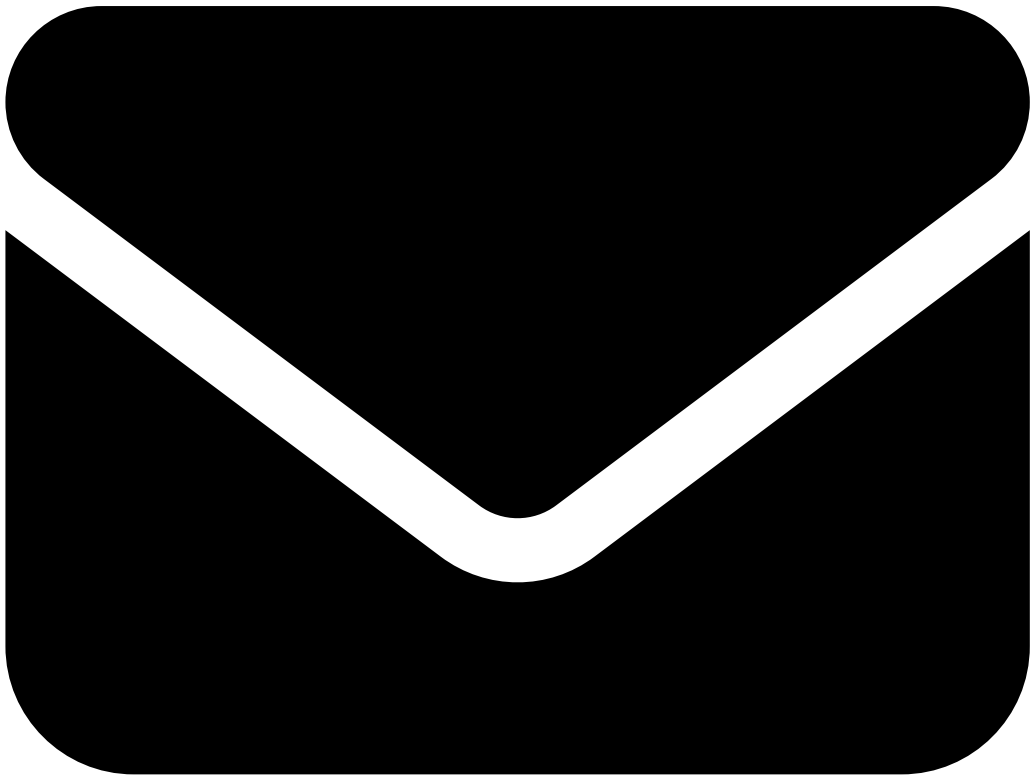
Italian
lasagna bolognese with béchamel sauce

Squash Varieties + Easy Cooking Ideas

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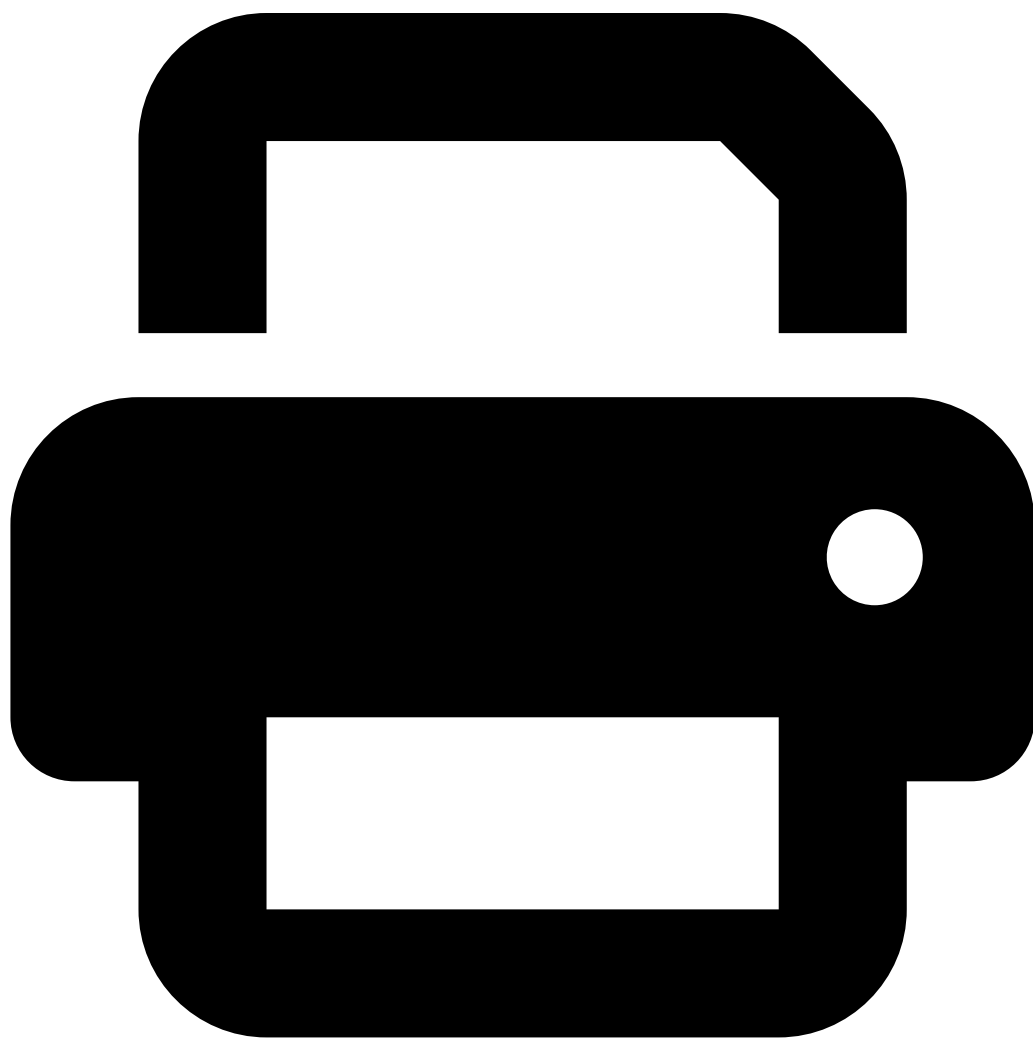
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Every fall, I look forward to squash season. Growing up, it was a staple at the market, and even now I can't resist filling my basket with all the different shapes and colors. Each variety has its own personality—some sweet and creamy, others nutty and hearty—and they all find their way into comforting dishes in my kitchen. From soups and pastas to stuffed squash dinners, these vegetables bring warmth to the table.

Why Squash is So Special

Squash is more than just pretty on the counter—it's wholesome, versatile, and naturally comforting. Packed with fiber, vitamins, and antioxidants, it's a vegetable that feels indulgent while being nourishing. And I love how it works in both savory dishes (like roasted squash with herbs or creamy risottos) and sweet recipes (cakes, muffins, even cookies).

Things to know about Squash Varieties + Easy Cooking Ideas

Common Types of Squash

- **Butternut Squash**

Sweet, creamy, and one of the most popular varieties. Perfect for soups, roasting, or blending into a pasta sauce.

- **Acorn Squash**

Mild and nutty with a tender texture. Its natural “bowl” shape makes it perfect for stuffing with sausage, rice, or grains.

- **Delicata Squash**

Quick-cooking with edible skin, slightly sweet flavor, and beautiful striped skin. Great roasted in slices or tossed into salads.

- **Spaghetti Squash**

Once baked, its flesh turns into golden strands that mimic pasta. A fun and lighter way to serve saucy dishes.

Easy Ways to Cook Squash

- Roast with olive oil, garlic, and fresh herbs.
- Stuff with sausage, rice, or seasonal vegetables.
- Puree into soups, sauces, or risottos.
- Toss into pasta or gnocchi.
- Bake into breads, muffins, or cakes.

How to pick: Look for squash that feels heavy for its size, with firm skin and no soft spots.

Storage: Whole squash keeps well on the counter for 1–2 months. Once cut, store in the fridge and use within a week. Cooked squash can be frozen for up to 3 months.

Peeling tip: Microwave a whole squash for 2–3 minutes before peeling—it softens the skin and makes it easier to handle.

A Cozy Recipe to Try: Creamy Butternut Squash Pasta with Italian Sausage

Now that we've explored the different types of squash and how versatile they can be, I wanted to share one of my favorite ways to enjoy butternut squash in the fall. It turns into the creamiest pasta sauce, and when paired with Italian sausage, it becomes the kind of hearty, comforting meal everyone loves.

If you're ready to start cooking with squash, I've got a few more cozy recipes to get you inspired. My Italian sausage & spinach butternut squash stuffed Roasted Butternut Squash Gnocch

Creamy Butternut Squash Pasta with Italian sausage



- 1 medium butternut squash (about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ –3 lbs), peeled,

- seeded, and cubed
- 3 tbsp olive oil, divided
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp crushed red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1 lb Italian sausage (mild or spicy), casings removed
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chicken broth (or vegetable broth)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy cream
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 12 oz short pasta (rigatoni, penne, or orecchiette work well)
- Fresh sage or parsley, for garnish

1. Roast the Squash.

Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C). Toss cubed butternut squash with 2 tbsp olive oil, salt, pepper, and crushed red pepper flakes. Spread on a baking sheet and roast for 25–30 minutes, until tender and caramelized.

2. Cook the Pasta.

While the squash roasts, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook pasta according to package directions until al dente. Reserve 1 cup pasta water, then drain.

3. Cook the Sausage.

In a large skillet, heat 1 tbsp olive oil over medium heat. Add Italian sausage, breaking it apart with a spoon, and cook until browned and cooked through. Remove sausage from the pan and set aside.

4. Make the Sauce.

In the same skillet, add onion and sauté until softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook 1 minute more.

Add roasted squash and broth. Simmer for 3–4 minutes, then blend (with an immersion blender or carefully in a regular blender) until smooth and creamy. Stir in the heavy cream and Parmesan.

5. Combine Everything.

Return the sausage to the skillet. Add cooked pasta and toss, adding reserved pasta water as needed for a silky sauce.

6. Serve.

Garnish with fresh sage or parsley, extra Parmesan, and a drizzle of good olive oil. Serve warm.

7. Storage

Leftovers keep well in the fridge for 3 days. Reheat gently with a splash of broth or cream to loosen the sauce.

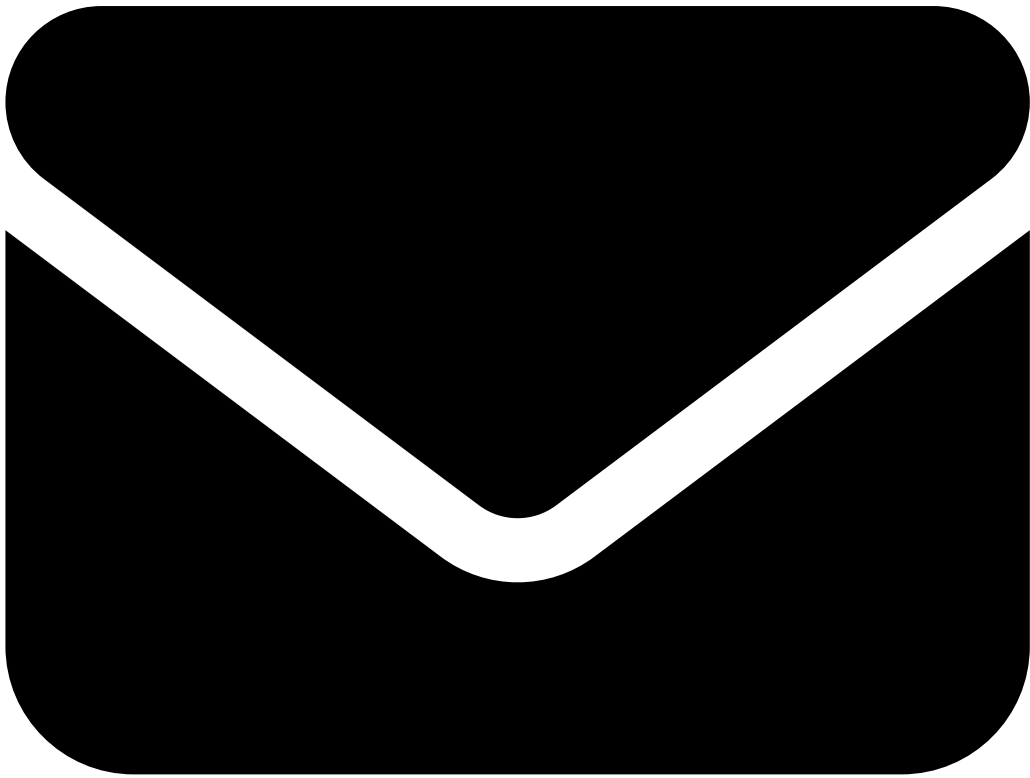
Butternut Squash Gnocchi with Gorgonzola

Butternut Squash Gnocchi with Gorgonzola

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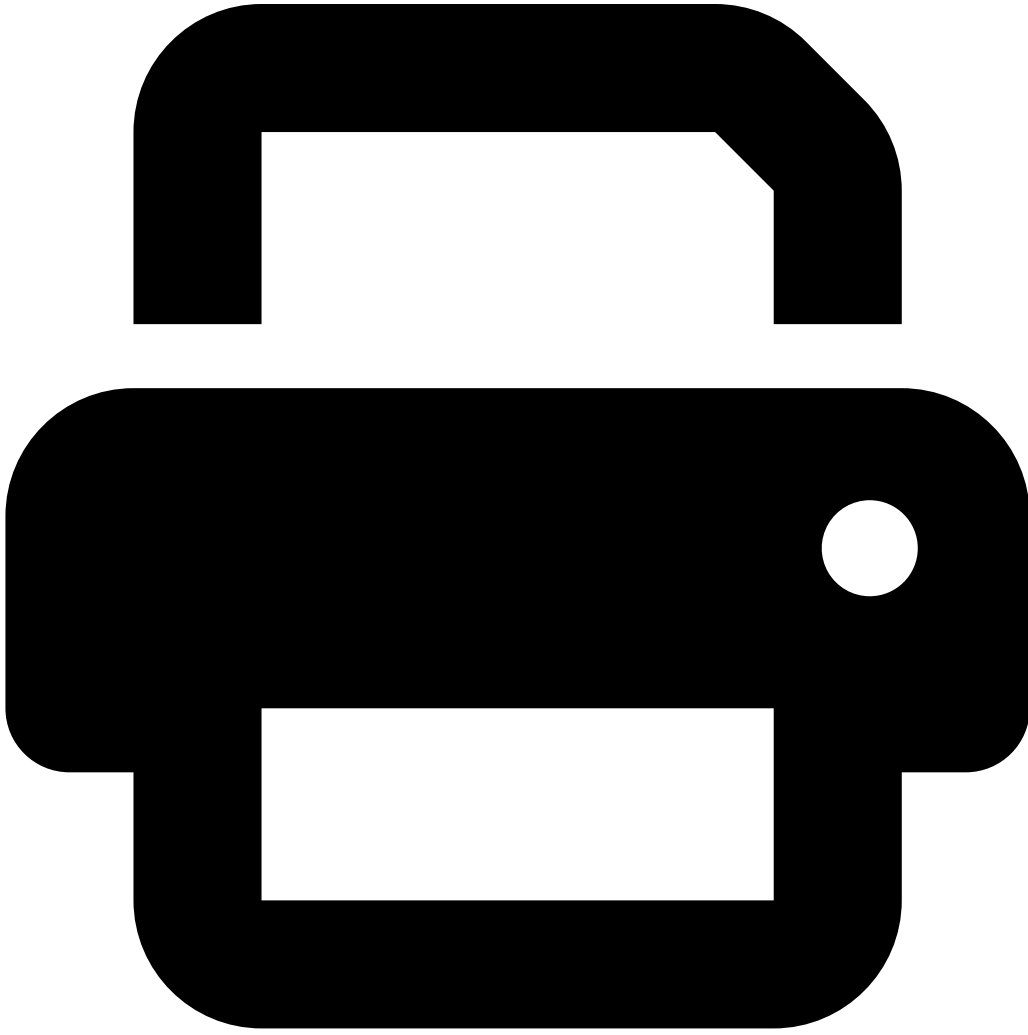
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Fall is in the air, and nothing says cozy quite like roasted butternut squash gnocchi. This recipe combines the sweetness of roasted butternut squash with delicate soft gnocchi, perfect for pairing with creamy gorgonzola sauce.

It's no wonder most Italian restaurants have gnocchi on the menu. Most home cooks are intimidated by making gnocchi at home. I am here to tell you you don't have to be.

Making homemade gnocchi is a lot easier than you think. The most challenging part is getting the dough to the right consistency to produce the soft light gnocchi dumplings. This may take a few attempts, and that's okay. After a few tries you will be making gnocchi like a pro.

Whether you're new to making gnocchi or a seasoned pro, this easy to follow recipe is bound to become a favorite.

Things to know about this Butternut Squash Gnocchi with Gorgonzola”

1. Butternut squash is a seasonal fall vegetable, bringing a natural sweetness to the gnocchi that pairs well with many sauces.
2. These gnocchi are easy to make. This recipe simplifies the process. making it a beginner friendly gnocchi recipe
3. The recipe is versatile pair the gnocchi with a browned butter and sage, marinara or a creamy pancetta gorgonzola sauce like I did. If you would like the recipe for the sauce I used let me know, if I should write a blog post.
4. This recipe is perfect for meal prep. These gnocchi are freezer friendly, so you can a batch in advance to enjoy anytime, or make a double batch one for now and one for later.
5. As always , please let met know if you make this easy roasted butternut squash gnocchi recipe. I love hearing from you. And it helps others. THANKS!!!
6. **Warm up this fall with these cozy Italian dishes:**

- **Creamy Mushroom and Italian Sausage Risotto** – rich, earthy, and perfect for chilly evenings.
- **Italian-Style Cabbage Rolls** – hearty, satisfying, and full of fall flavors.

Don't forget to save this Butternut Squash Gnocchi recipe—it's the ultimate cozy fall dinner!

Butternut Squash Gnocchi with Gorgonzola



Tender potato gnocchi are tossed with roasted butternut squash and a creamy Gorgonzola sauce for a rich, comforting Italian-inspired meal. Finished with fresh sage and toasted walnuts, this elegant pasta is perfect for cozy dinners and special occasions.

For the Gnocchi

- 2-3 cups roasted and mashed butternut squash (about 1 medium squash)
- 1-1½ cups all-purpose flour (start with 1 cup and add more as needed)
- 1 egg
- ½ cup parmesan cheese
- salt and pepper to taste
- A pinch of Nutmeg

For the Gorgonzola Cream Sauce

- 1 cup heavy cream
- 4 oz Gorgonzola cheese, crumbled
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter
- 2-3 oz pancetta, diced
- 1 small shallot, finely minced (optional)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Pinch of nutmeg

- Chopped parsley

1. Start by peeling and cleaning out the squash. Then cut into equal pieces. Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper lay the butternut squash on top drizzle with olive oil salt and pepper to taste. Roast in a preheated 375-degree oven until fork tender about 20 minutes. Mash the squash into a smooth puree. Refrigerate until chilled
2. Put the flour on a broad. Make a well in the center add the rest of the ingredients , the squash, egg and parmesan cheese including salt and pepper.
3. Begin incorporating the flour into the wet ingredients kneading the dough until smooth, adding more flour a little at a time , until you have a smooth dough the dough will be slightly sticking. Let the dough rest covered for 30 minutes.
4. Then section the dough into 8 equal pieces. Roll into 12 inch long ropes flour lightly, cut the ropes into 1/2 inch pieces flour lightly. Using a fork and your thumb roll the gnocchi pieces into the classic shape. I have included a video showing the technic.
5. Roast the Squash. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C). Cut the squash in half, remove seeds, and roast cut-side down until tender (about 30–35 minutes). Scoop out the flesh and mash it, letting excess moisture evaporate.
6. Make the Gnocchi Dough. In a bowl, combine the mashed squash, egg, salt, and nutmeg. Gradually add 1 cup of flour, mixing gently until a soft dough forms. Add more flour as needed—dough should be slightly sticky but workable.
7. Shape the Gnocchi. Divide dough into portions. Roll each into a rope about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick, then cut into 1-inch

pieces. Optional: roll each piece over a fork for the classic gnocchi ridges.

8. Cook the Gnocchi. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook gnocchi in batches until they float (about 2–3 minutes). Remove with a slotted spoon and set aside.
9. Make the Gorgonzola Cream Sauce. In a skillet, melt the butter over medium heat cook diced pancetta until crisp. Remove and set aside. Sauté shallots until soft and translucent lower the heat, stir in cream until warm but not boiling. Add Gorgonzola in small pieces, stirring until smooth. Season with salt, pepper, and a pinch of nutmeg. Stir the crispy pancetta back into the sauce.
10. Combine and Serve. Toss the cooked gnocchi gently in the sauce until coated. Serve immediately, garnished with Freshly chopped Italian parsley

11. **Storage Instructions**

Uncooked Gnocchi:

Place gnocchi on a floured baking sheet in a single layer. Freeze for 1–2 hours, then transfer to a freezer-safe bag or container.

Cook from frozen in boiling salted water; they will float when done.

Cooked Gnocchi with Sauce:

Store leftover gnocchi and sauce separately in airtight containers in the fridge for up to 3 days.

Reheat gently in a skillet over low heat, adding a splash of cream or milk if needed to loosen the sauce.

Italian

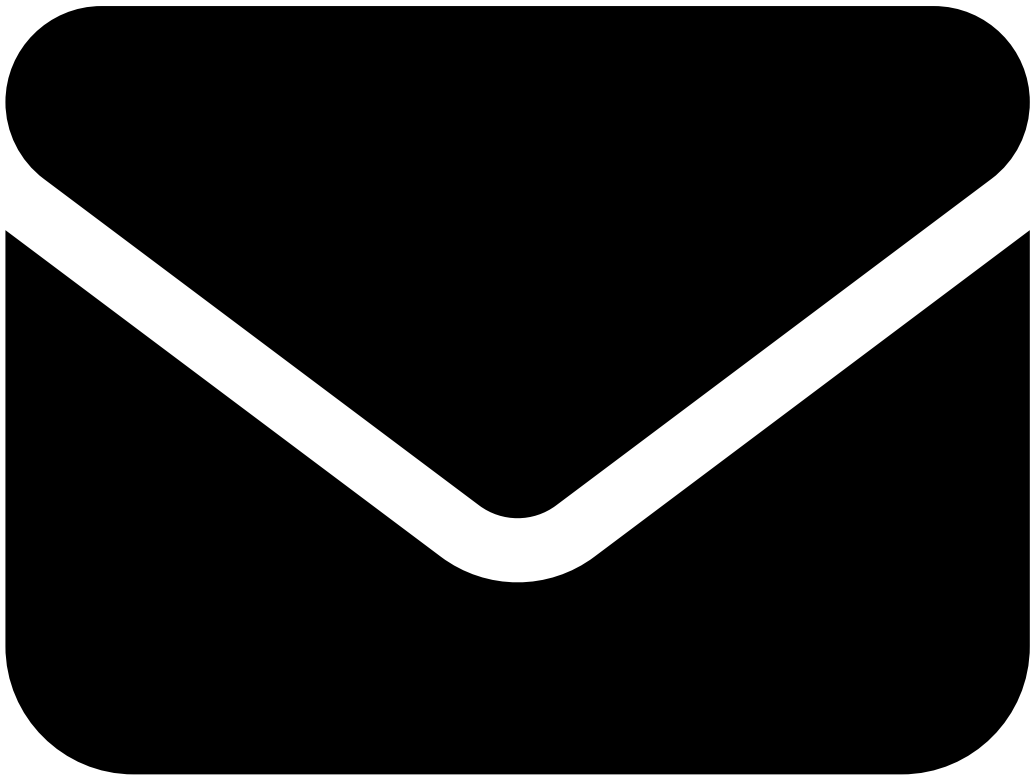
butternut squash gnocchi with Gorgonzola

Creamy Mushroom and Italian Sausage Risotto

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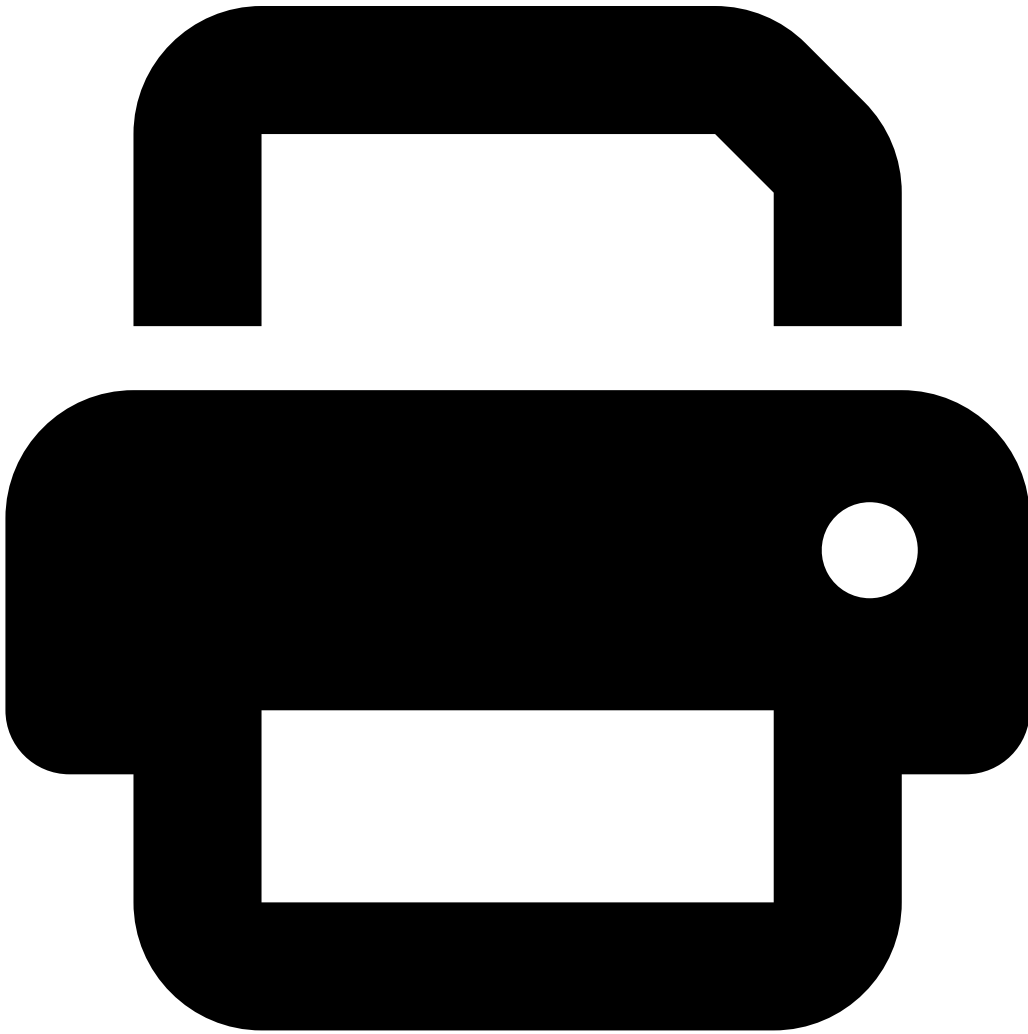
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It's no surprise most Italian restaurants have risotto on their menu, it seems too complicated for the home cook.

Well I am here to tell you this Homemade Restaurant creamy Mushroom and Italian sausage risotto isn't complicated at all.

Risotto is a northern Italian rice dish cooked with broth until it reaches a creamy consistency.

The broth can be derived from meat, fish or vegetables, I used chicken broth, if you are vegetarian you can use vegetable stock.

This is one of those recipes you make a enough of, for next day reheats or freeze for a quick ready made meal.

Plus, risotto is easy and versatile enough to have on your family weeknight meal plan. This restaurant quality recipe is also prefect for Holiday dinner with friends, to show off what a great home chef you are.

Things to know about this Creamy Mushroom and Italian Sausage Risotto

- **Rice Matters:** Arborio rice is best for risotto because it releases starch as it cooks, giving you that creamy texture. Don't substitute with regular long-grain rice.
- **Broth Temperature:** Keep your chicken broth warm. Adding cold broth slows down the cooking and can make the risotto less creamy.
- **Stir Often:** Risotto needs attention! Stirring helps release the starch from the rice and prevents sticking.
- **Sausage Options:** You can use sweet or spicy Italian sausage depending on your taste. Either works beautifully with the mushrooms.
- **Finishing Touch:** Stir in butter and Parmesan off the heat for an extra creamy, rich finish. A sprinkle of fresh parsley brightens the dish just before serving.
- **Make-Ahead Tip:** Risotto is best served immediately, but if you need to make it ahead, undercook it slightly, then reheat with a splash of broth to bring it back to creamy perfection.
- Craving more comforting Italian dishes? Check out my **Classic Chicken Parmesan**, **Creamy Italian Sausage mushroom Pasta**, or **Zuppa Toscana Soup** for more hearty, restaurant-style recipes you can make at home. Don't forget to **save this risotto recipe** so you can enjoy it any night of the week!

Creamy Mushroom and Italian Sausage Risotto



This Creamy Mushroom and Italian Sausage Risotto is rich, creamy, and full of authentic Italian flavor. Made with Arborio rice, savory Italian sausage, earthy mushrooms, Parmesan cheese, and a splash of white wine, this comforting dish is perfect for a cozy weeknight dinner or a special occasion.

- 2 links Italian sausage, casings removed
- 2 cups Arborio rice
- 8 oz, mushrooms, sliced (cremini, button, or mixed)
- 2 Tbsp. shallot, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 4 cups chicken broth, kept warm
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 Tbsp. butter
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- 2 Tbsp fresh Italian parsley, chopped
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

1. Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a large skillet or saucepan. Add the sausage, breaking it up as it cooks, until browned.
2. In the same pan, add the remaining olive oil and 1

tablespoon butter. Sauté the onion until soft, then add garlic and mushrooms. Cook until mushrooms are golden.

3. Stir in the Arborio rice and toast for 1–2 minutes until edges are translucent.
4. Pour in the wine, stirring until it is absorbed.
5. Begin adding warm chicken broth one ladleful at a time, stirring often. Allow each addition to be absorbed before adding more. Continue until the rice is creamy and tender, about 18–20 minutes.
6. Add the cream and simmer 5 minutes longer.
7. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately while creamy.

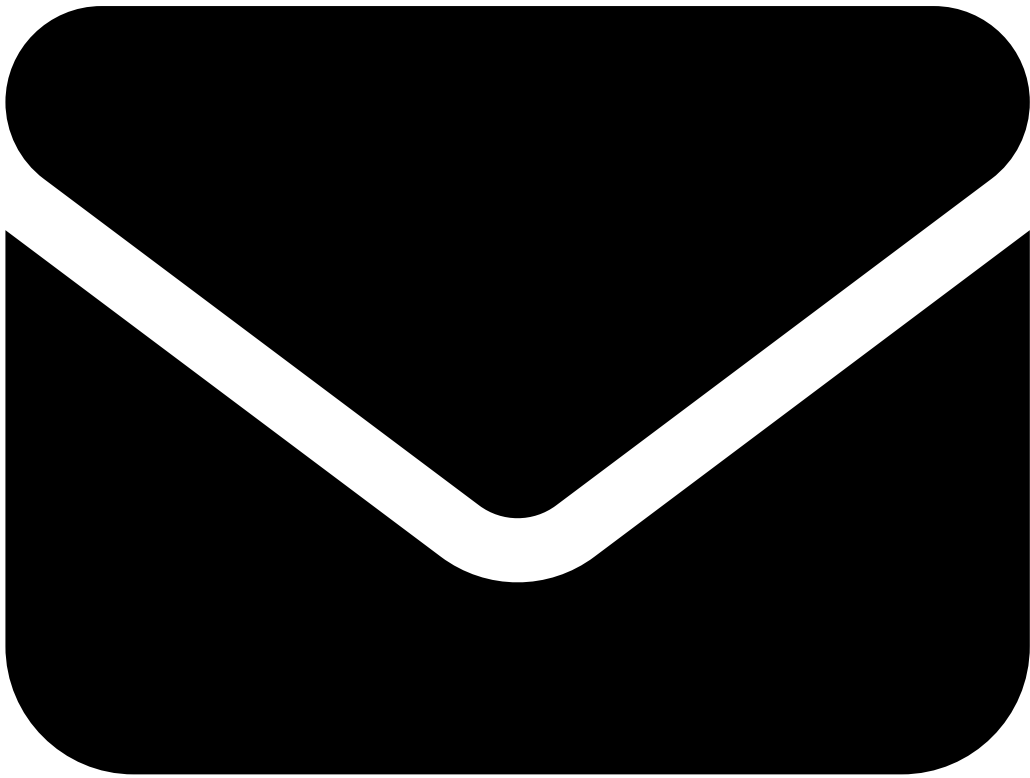
Main Course, Side Dish
Italian

Italian Sausage and Mushroom Pasta

Italian Sausage and Mushroom Pasta

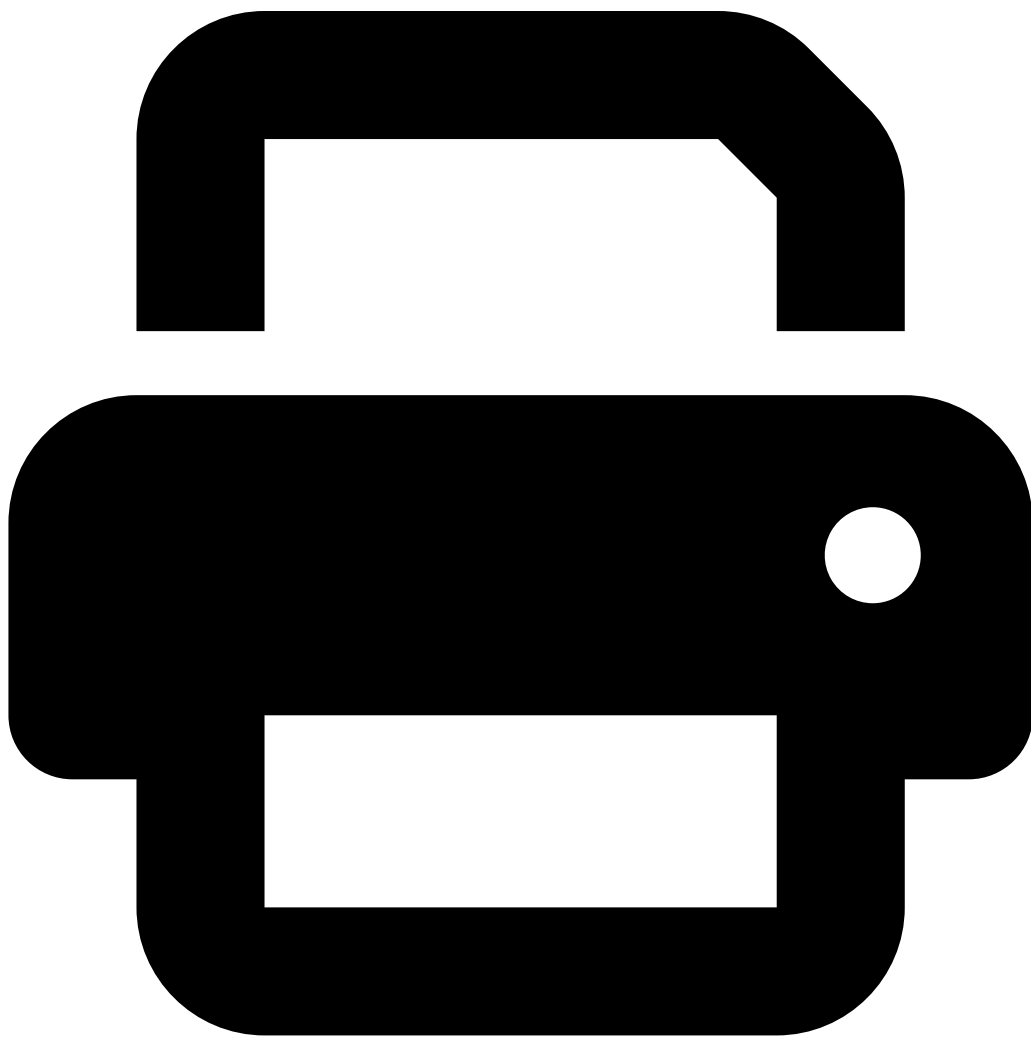
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This rustic **Italian sausage and mushroom pasta** is the kind of dish that brings the warmth of an Italian countryside kitchen right to your table. Savory sausage, earthy mushrooms, and sweet onions are simmered in a tomato-based sauce, then tossed 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

Italian Sausage and Mushroom Pasta



Italian Sausage and Mushroom Pasta is an easy Italian dinner featuring savory sausage, earthy mushrooms, garlic, and herbs tossed with perfectly cooked pasta in a rich, flavorful sauce. It's a hearty family meal that's ready in about 40 minutes.

- 12 oz pasta (rigatoni, penne, or orecchiette work best)
- 1 lb. Italian sausage (mild or spicy, casings removed)
- 8 oz mushrooms (cremini, button, or a mix), sliced
- 1/2 cup onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1 cup pasta water
- 14 oz can crushed tomatoes
- 1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese
- 2 tsp. oregano
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- Fresh parsley, for garnish + grated parmesan

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.

Main Course

Italian

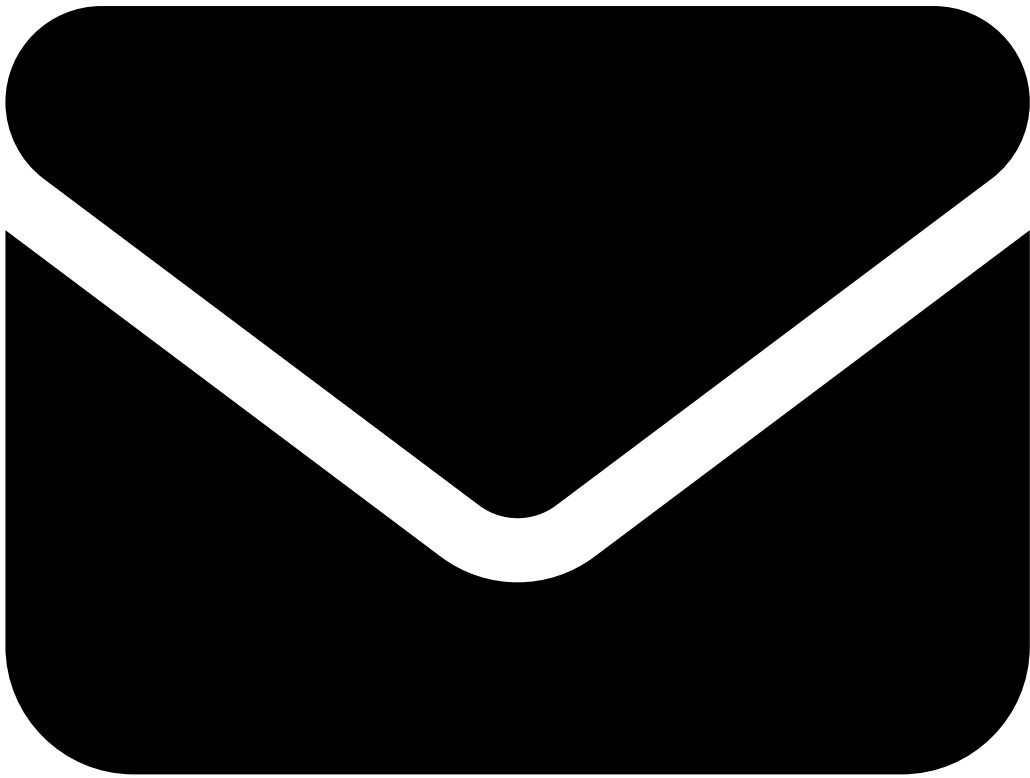
best Italian sausage mushroom pasta recipe

Chicken Meatballs with Marry Me Orzo

Chicken Meatballs with Marry Me Orzo

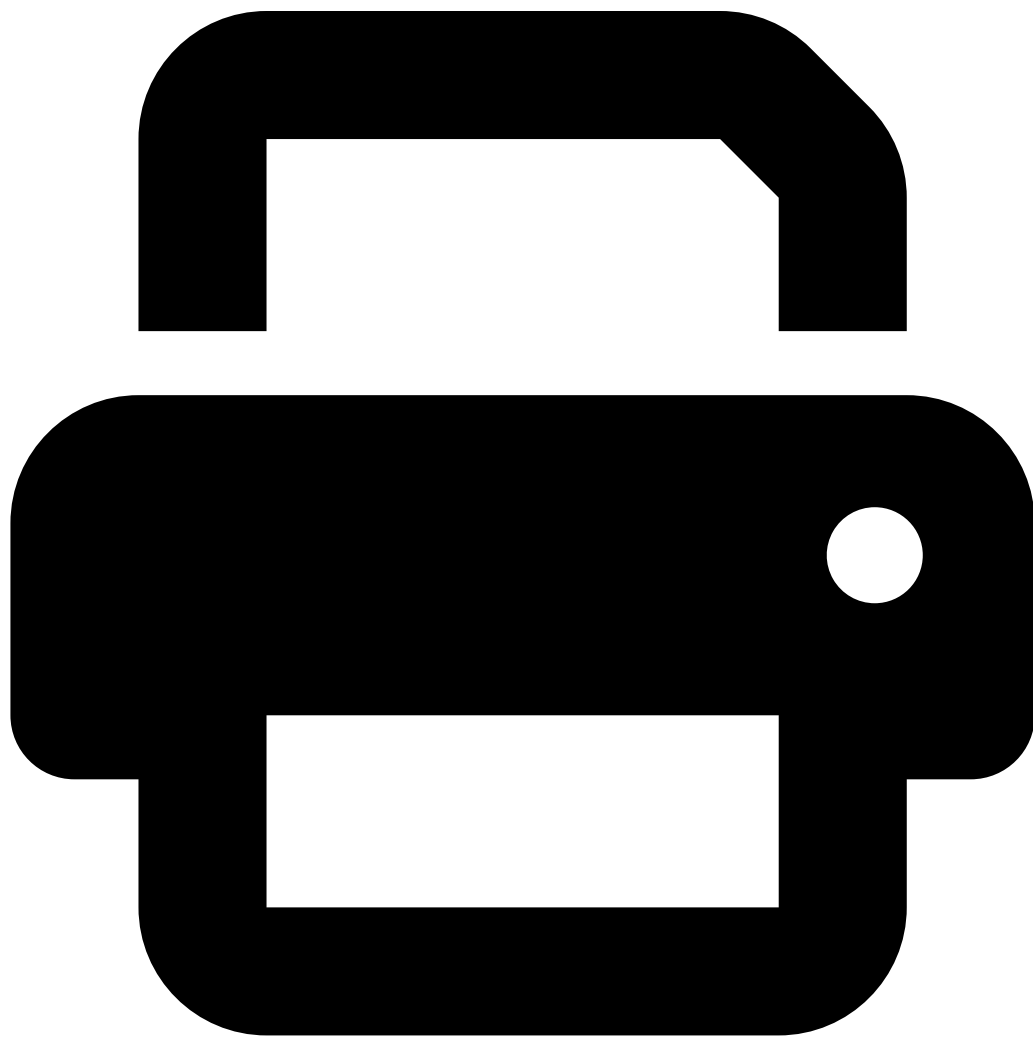
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Tender chicken meatballs are always a hit at the dinner table, and when you pair them with creamy *Marry Me Orzo*, you've got the ultimate comfort meal. This dish brings together juicy baked chicken meatballs and orzo pasta simmered in a rich Parmesan 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



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

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.

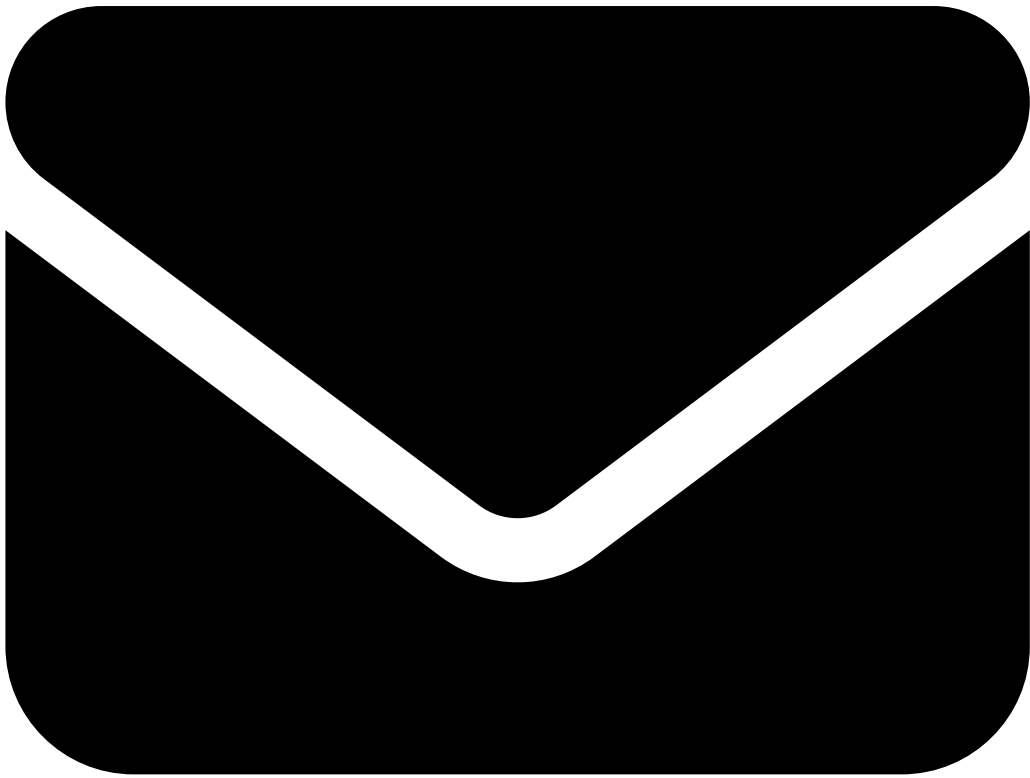
Creamy Butternut Squash

Risotto with Arborio

Creamy Butternut Squash Risotto with Arborio”

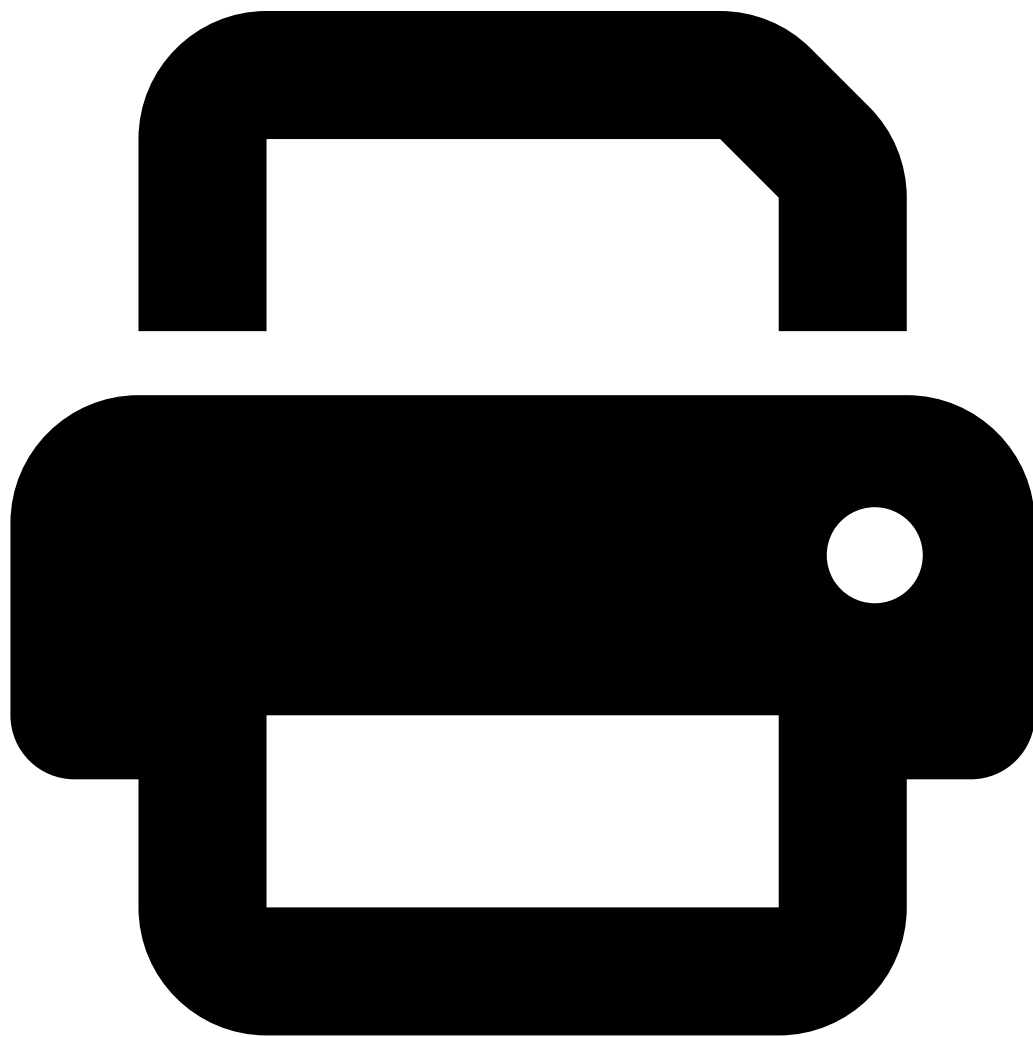
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It's no surprise most Italian restaurants have risotto on their menu, it seems too complicated for the home cook. Am here to tell you it's not complicated at all. This creamy butternut squash risotto with arborio was a restaurant menu favorite, it's easy to make, uses few ingredients and it's delicious.

Risotto is a classic Northern Italian rice dish slowly cooked in broth until it becomes rich and creamy. The broth can be made from meat, fish, or vegetables—I used chicken broth, but if you're vegetarian, vegetable stock works just as well.

Creamy Butternut Squash Risotto with Arborio



- 2 cups Italian short grain rice
 - 1 small butternut squash (peeled seeded and cubed)
 - 2 Tbsp. olive oil + 2 tablespoons butter
 - 1/2 cup minced shallots
 - 1 Tablespoons minced garlic
 - 2 cups chopped spinach
 - 4 cups chicken stock
 - 1 cup white wine
 - 1 cup crumbled gorgonzola cheese
 - 1 cup grated parmesan
 - 2 tablespoons chopped Italian parsley
 - 1/2 cup pine nuts
 - salt and pepper to taste
1. Peel and cut butternut squash into cubes drizzle with olive oil, salt and pepper roast in a 375 degree oven for 30 minutes
 2. Mean while heat chicken stock keep warm, in a deep saute pan heat the butter and olive oil, add onion and garlic, saute until translucent,
 3. Add the rice cook until golden, salt and pepper to taste, add hot chicken stock slowly and a little at a time waiting until the stock is absorbed before adding more while stirring continuously, Continue adding the broth until all is used
 4. Cook until risotto is firm to the bite cooked about 20 minutes. Add parmesan cheese, roasted butternut squash,
 5. Add the gorgonzola and more broth if the sauce is to thick. Top with Italian parsley, more gorgonzola and

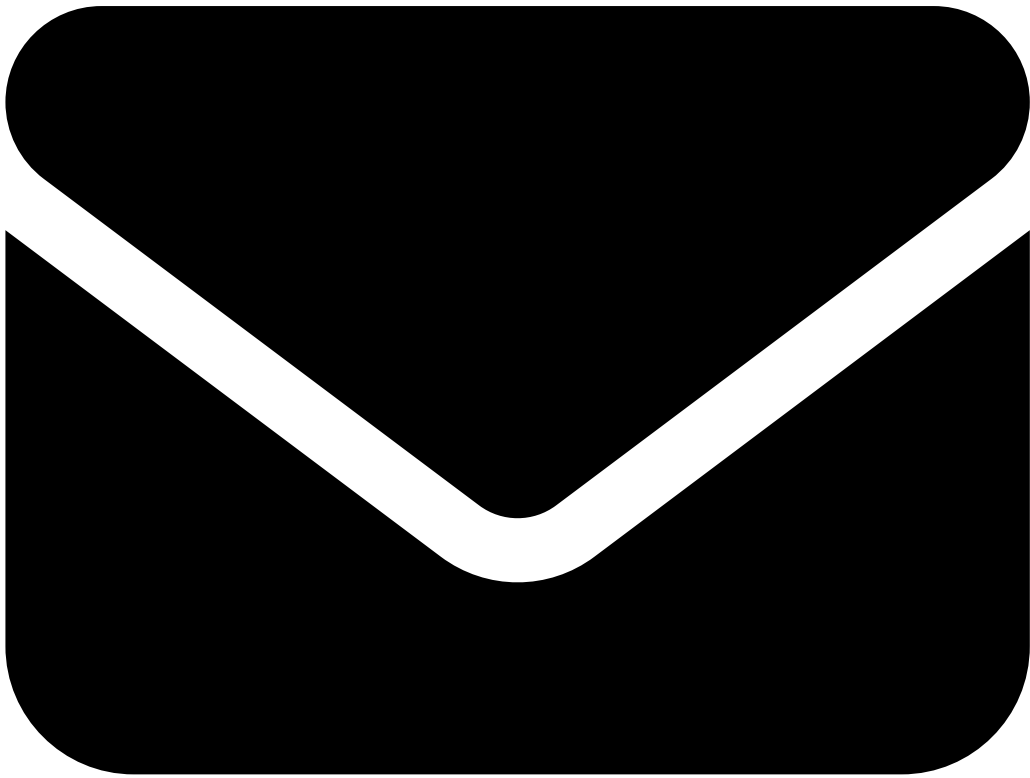
toasted pine nuts....ENJOY!!

Orecchiette with Italian Sausage and Broccoli Rabe

Orecchiette with Italian Sausage and broccoli Rabe

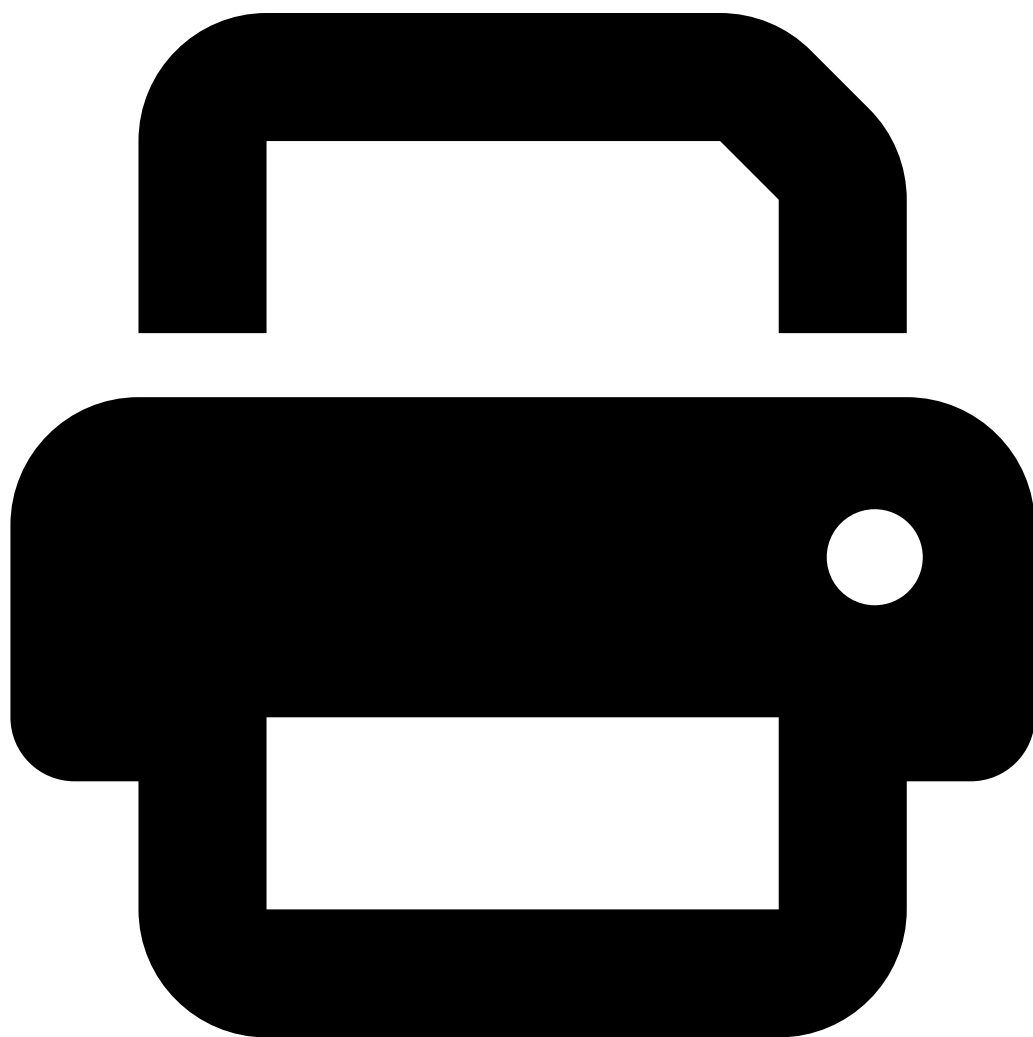
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Orecchiette with Italian Sausage and Broccoli rabe was a favorite on our restaurant menu – not just with our guests, but with the cooks in the kitchen too. They loved making it because it came together quickly and easily, yet never failed to impress. The little “ears” of pasta held onto every bit of savory sausage and garlic, while the broccolini added a fresh, vibrant balance. It was rustic, comforting, and satisfying – the kind of dish that reminded us all why simple Italian cooking is so timeless. Now, I’m sharing it here so you can enjoy the same flavors at home.

- **Broccoli rabe is meant to be slightly bitter.** Its earthy, peppery flavor is what makes this dish so traditional. The richness of the Italian sausage balances the bitterness perfectly.
- **Don’t overcook the broccoli rabe.** Blanching it briefly before adding it to the skillet helps tame the bitterness while keeping it vibrant and tender.
- **Use good-quality Italian sausage.** Sweet or hot Italian

sausage both work well. Hot sausage adds a little extra kick, while sweet sausage lets the broccoli rabe shine.

- **Orecchiette is the traditional pasta.** Meaning “little ears” in Italian, the pasta’s cup-like shape catches the crumbled sausage, garlic, and small pieces of broccoli rabe in every bite.
- **Reserve the pasta water.** Before draining the pasta, save about 1 cup of the cooking water. The starchy water helps create a silky sauce that coats the pasta without needing cream.
- **Freshly grated Parmesan makes a difference.** Skip the pre-shredded cheese if possible. Fresh Parmesan melts smoothly and adds a richer, nuttier flavor.
- **A touch of heat is traditional.** Red pepper flakes complement the sausage and broccoli rabe without overpowering the dish. Add more or less to suit your taste.
- **This is a true Italian pantry meal.** With just a handful of simple ingredients, this recipe proves that authentic Italian cooking relies on quality ingredients rather than complicated techniques.
- **It reheats beautifully.** Store leftovers in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. Add a splash of water or chicken broth when reheating to loosen the sauce.
- **Finish with extra virgin olive oil.** A light drizzle just before serving brightens the flavors and gives the dish the authentic finishing touch found in many Italian kitchens.

Orecchiette with Italian Sausage and Broccoli Rabe



This **Orecchiette with Italian Sausage and Broccoli Rabe** is a classic Southern Italian pasta dish that's simple enough for a weeknight but impressive enough for guests. Savory Italian sausage, slightly bitter broccoli rabe, garlic, and a touch of red pepper flakes come together with orecchiette to create a perfectly balanced meal finished with freshly grated Parmesan cheese.

- 12 oz orecchiette pasta
- 1 lb. spicy Italian sausage (casings removed)
- 1 bunch broccolini (trimmed and cut into bite-sized pieces)
- 3 cloves minced garlic
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp red pepper flakes (adjust to taste)
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 1 cup reserved pasta water
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese (plus extra for serving)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper (to taste)

1. Prep the broccoli rabe Trim off the tough ends of the broccolini stems (about ½ inch) and cut the stalks into

bite-sized pieces, keeping the florets mostly intact.

2. Blanch the broccoli Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add broccolini and cook for 2–3 minutes until bright green and just tender. Transfer to a kitchen towel dry and set aside.
3. Cook the pasta: In the same pot of salted water, add orecchiette and cook until al dente. Reserve 1 cup of pasta water before draining.
4. Cook the sausage: In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add sausage and cook, breaking it into small pieces, until browned and cooked through, about 6–7 minutes.
5. Build the sauce: Add , garlic, onion and red pepper flakes. Cook until fragrant and translucent. (3-4 minutes.) deglaze the pan with the white wine, waiting until fully absorbed before proceeding. Then add the chicken stock, and pasta water, simmer for 5 minutes or until sauce begins to thicken.
6. Combine everything: Add pasta and blanched broccoli rabe to the skillet, tossing with sausage. Gradually add reserved pasta water until the sauce lightly coats the pasta.
7. Finish and serve: Stir in Parmesan, season with salt and pepper, and toss well. Serve hot with extra cheese on top.

Main Course

Italian

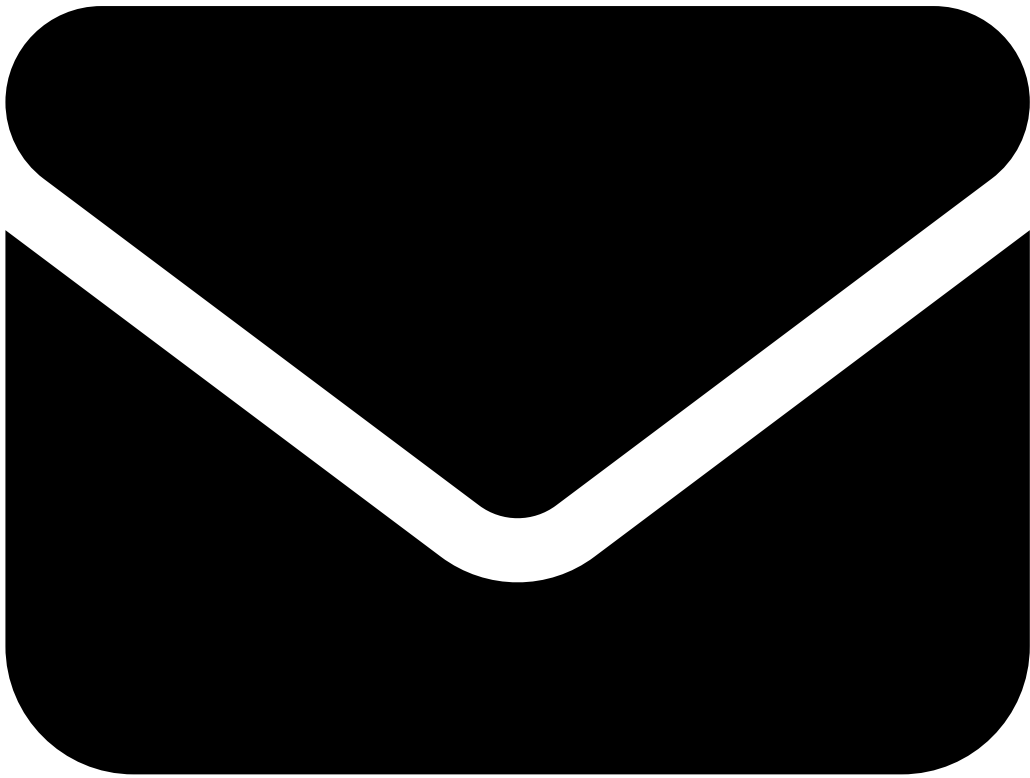
Italian Orecchiette with Sausage and Broccoli Rabe

How to make ricotta gnocchi

How to make ricotta gnocchi

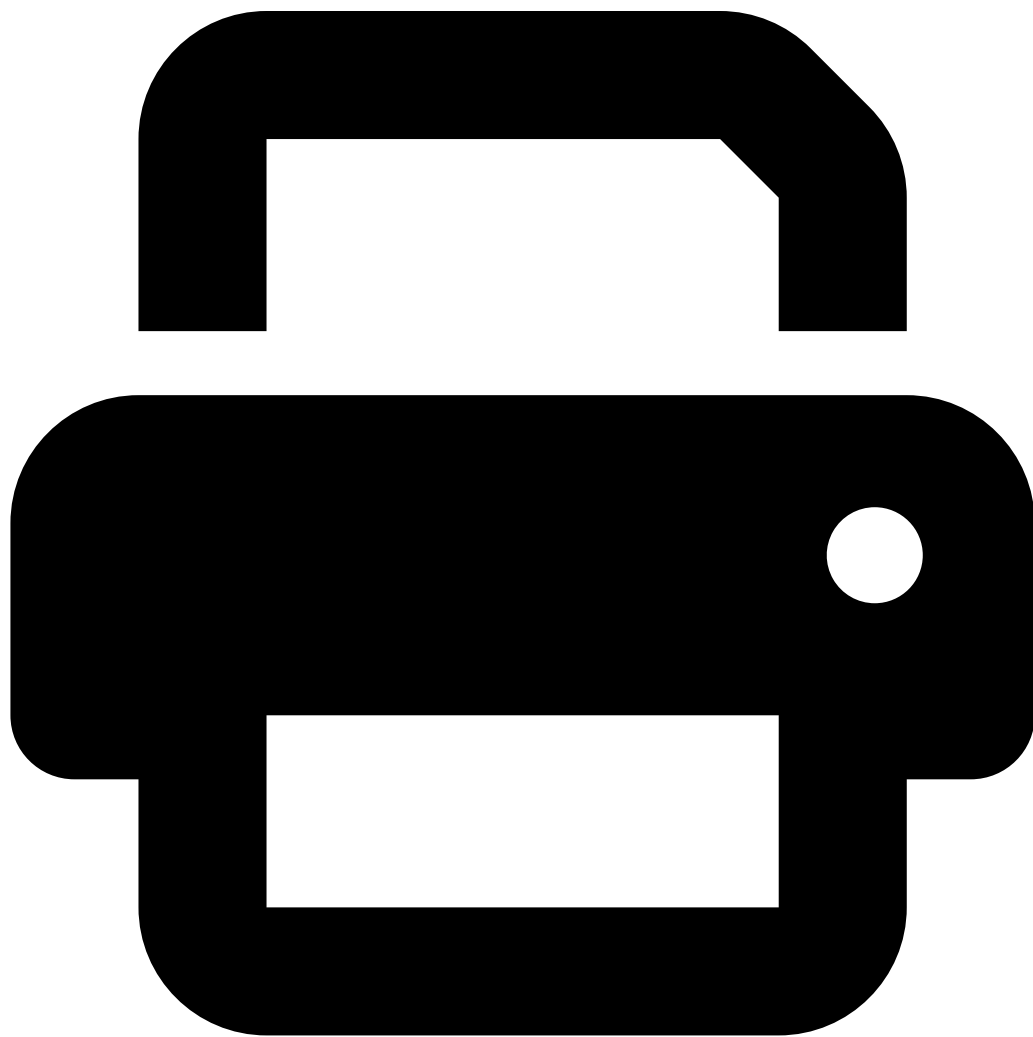
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In my restaurant days, we made gnocchi in every style you could imagine—potato, spinach, ricotta—and we'd prepare them in big batches, freeze them, and cook them to order so they were always perfectly tender. Out of all the variations, ricotta gnocchi have always been my favorite for their light, pillowy texture and delicate flavor. In this recipe, I'm keeping things simple and seasonal by serving them with a fresh summer tomato sauce made from ripe, juicy tomatoes. It's an easy and comforting dish that comes together quickly, yet feels special enough for a Sunday dinner.

Things to know about this how to make ricotta gnocchi

- **Drain the ricotta well** – Too much moisture makes the dough sticky and heavy. Strain it for at least 2 hours (overnight is even better).

- **Flour ratio matters** – Start with less flour and add only as much as needed. Too much flour makes dense gnocchi; too little and they'll fall apart.
- **Do the test gnocchi** – Drop one piece into simmering water. If it floats and holds together, your dough is ready. If it falls apart, mix in a little more flour.
- **Freeze for later** – Just like we did in the restaurant, you can freeze gnocchi on a sheet pan, then transfer to a bag once firm. Cook straight from frozen.
- **Sauce pairings** – Ricotta gnocchi are light and delicate, so they shine with equally light sauces:
 - Fresh summer tomato sauce (as I used in this recipe)
 - Brown butter and sage for a nutty, comforting flavor
 - Lemon cream sauce for a bright and elegant twist
 - Love gnocchi as much as I do? Try my **4-Ingredient Potato Gnocchi** recipe—another classic, simple to make, and just as delicious!

Looking for the perfect finish? Pair your ricotta gnocchi with one of my favorite sauces: **Fresh Summer Tomato Sauce**.

Ricotta Gnocchi Recipe



- 1 pound 450 g ricotta cheese, well drained
- 1 large egg
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup 50 g grated Parmigiano Reggiano
- $\frac{3}{4}$ –1 cup 90–120 g all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- Pinch black pepper
- Pinch nutmeg (optional)

1. Drain the Ricotta

Place ricotta in a fine mesh strainer or wrap in cheesecloth.

Let it drain in the fridge for at least 2 hours (overnight is best).

2. Make the Dough

In a bowl, mix ricotta, egg, Parmesan, salt, pepper, and nutmeg until smooth.

Add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup flour and gently fold together. The dough should be soft but not sticky.

3. Test the Dough

Bring a small pot of salted water to a gentle simmer.

Roll a small piece of dough into a ball and drop it in.

If it holds together and floats, the dough is ready. If

it falls apart, add a bit more flour (1 Tbsp at a time) and retest.

4. Shape the Gnocchi

Lightly flour a work surface. Divide dough into 4 pieces.

Roll each piece into a rope about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick.

Cut into 1-inch pieces. Optional: roll each piece over a fork or gnocchi board for ridges.

5. Cook the Gnocchi

Bring a large pot of salted water to a gentle boil.

Drop in gnocchi in batches, stir once, and cook until they float (1–2 minutes).

Remove with a slotted spoon directly into your warmed sauce.

6. Serve

Toss gently in sauce and serve immediately with extra Parmesan.