

Treasure Barrel

Beef Lombardi Casserole Recipe - Cozy Family Meal

20 min Prep time	**50 min** Cook time	**1 h 10 min** Total time
8 Servings	**Medium** Difficulty	**Italian-American** Cuisine

Ingredients

For the Casserole

- [ ] 1 lb rigatoni or ziti pasta
- [ ] 2 lbs ground beef (85/15 recommended)
- [ ] 1 large yellow onion, finely chopped
- [ ] 4 cloves garlic, minced
- [ ] 2 (28-ounce) cans crushed tomatoes
- [ ] 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- [ ] 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- [ ] 1 teaspoon dried basil
- [ ] 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)
- [ ] 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- [ ] 1 teaspoon black pepper
- [ ] 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- [ ] 16 ounces whole milk mozzarella cheese, shredded
- [ ] 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- [ ] 2 tablespoons olive oil

For the Creamy Cheese Layer (Optional)

- [ ] 15 ounces whole milk ricotta cheese
- [ ] 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- [ ] 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- [ ] Pinch of nutmeg

Instructions

1. First, let's get the sauce started. It's the heart of the dish. In a large, heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the chopped onion and cook gently until it's soft and translucent, which usually takes about 5-7 minutes. You want it to soften without browning too much. Then, add the minced garlic and cook for just another minute until you can smell its beautiful aroma. Be careful not to let the garlic burn, or it will turn bitter. This initial step builds the first layer of flavor for our sauce.

2. Now, turn the heat up to medium-high and add the ground beef to the pot. Use a wooden spoon to break it apart as it cooks. You want to brown it evenly, letting it get some nice color, which adds so much depth. Once it's browned, carefully drain off any excess fat. Stir in the tomato paste and cook for a minute to deepen its flavor. Then, pour in the crushed tomatoes, and add the oregano, basil, red pepper flakes, salt, and pepper. Bring the sauce to a gentle simmer, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and let it cook for at least 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. The longer it simmers, the richer it will be.

3 While your sauce is simmering away and making the kitchen smell incredible, it's time to cook the pasta. Bring a large pot of generously salted water to a rolling boil. It should taste like the sea! Add your pasta and cook according to the package directions, but be sure to pull it out 1-2 minutes *before* it’s fully cooked, so it’s very al dente. This is so important because it will finish cooking in the oven and absorb some of that amazing sauce without getting mushy. Once it's ready, drain it well in a colander, but don’t rinse it. While that's happening, preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C).

4 Now for the fun part: assembly! If you're using the optional ricotta layer, mix the ricotta, beaten egg, Parmesan, and a pinch of nutmeg in a small bowl until smooth. In a large bowl, combine the drained pasta with about two-thirds of your meat sauce, stirring gently to coat every noodle. Spread a thin layer of the remaining sauce on the bottom of a 9x13-inch baking dish. Spoon half of the pasta mixture into the dish. If using, dot the ricotta mixture over the pasta, then top with half of the shredded mozzarella. Add the remaining pasta, then top with the rest of the sauce, the remaining mozzarella, and all of the Parmesan cheese.

5 Place your beautifully assembled casserole onto a baking sheet to catch any potential drips. Bake, uncovered, for 25-30 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and gloriously bubbly, and the edges are starting to turn a lovely golden brown. Ugh, it’s just the best sight. Once it's done, carefully remove it from the oven and let it rest on a wire rack for at least 10-15 minutes before serving. I know it’s tempting to dive right in, but this resting period allows the casserole to set, making it much easier to slice and serve. Garnish with fresh parsley before bringing it to the table.

Nutrition per serving

580 kcal	35 g	45 g	28 g
Calories	Protein	Carbs	Fat

Tips & notes

- Don't be shy with the salt in your pasta water. A well-salted water seasons the pasta from the inside out and is the first step to a flavorful final dish. It really does make a noticeable difference.
- Shredding your own cheese is a non-negotiable for me. The creamy melt you get from a block of whole milk mozzarella is far superior to the pre-shredded kind. It’s a small bit of effort for a huge payoff in texture and flavor.
- If your sauce tastes a bit too acidic from the tomatoes, a tiny pinch of sugar (no more than half a teaspoon) can help balance the flavors beautifully. Taste and adjust until it’s just right for you.