

PASTITSIO // OVEN-BAKED GREEK MACARONI

makes one 20"x13"x4"

for the meat sauce

1/4 cup olive oil

2-to-3 medium onions, diced

half a head garlic, minced

3 jalapeño chiles, sliced

2 1/2-to-3 1/4 lbs minced beef, preferably 10 %

tomato paste and pepper paste mixed with a bit of water

2 1/2 cups diced tomatoes, or one 28-oz can san marzano, drained

salt and black pepper

allspice, cinnamon, cloves, ground red Aleppo pepper

for the pasta

1 1/2-to-2 lbs Greek No.2 long macaroni (can use maccheroncelli, bucatini or ziti)

4 tablespoons butter

1 cup finely grated Stofalotyri cheese (can use parmesan or pecorino)

2-to-3 egg whites, whipped to peaks

for the béchamel sauce

half-a gallon milk, 8 cups

6-to-8 oz butter

1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour

salt and white pepper

freshly grated nutmeg

2-to-3 egg yolks plus 2 whole eggs

1-to-2 cups finely grated Stofalotyri cheese (can use parmesan or pecorino)

Make meat sauce. Sauté onions in oil on medium heat until softened. Add garlic and jalapeño. Cook for a couple of more minutes until translucent. Add meat and stir-cook on medium-high heat until browned. Add tomato and pepper pastes, water, tomato and spices and mix to combine. Bring to a gentle boil then simmer on low 60-to-90 minutes; make sure to stir occasionally to prevent bottom from sticking to pan. Adjust seasoning as needed then set aside to cool to room temperature.

Prepare macaroni. Cook pasta in salted and oiled boiling water until 3/4 done. Drain and immediately toss in butter until thoroughly covered. Allow to cool slightly. Mix in cheese then gently fold in whipped egg whites. Press into a lightly buttered 20"x13"x4" casserole dish. Cool to room temperature.

Spread meat sauce over pasta, place in the refrigerator and chill until firm.

Make cheesy white sauce. Place milk in a pot and bring to a gentle simmer over medium-low heat. Melt butter over low heat in a separate heavy-bottomed saucepan. Add flour all at once and whisk until lump free then cook for a few seconds. Slowly add warm milk in small batches as you whisk be patient, it will look lumpy at first but will eventually break down to a smooth mixture. Add salt, white pepper and freshly grated nutmeg.

If you are inexperienced at making flour-based sauces, keep heat on low or medium-low and cook sauce, as you stir, until bubbly and thick. I tend to increase heat to medium-high at first and whisk vigorously and continuously to avoid bottom from sticking to pan, reduce heat to medium once mixture starts to thicken then cook on medium-low until sauce is done.

Break eggs with fork in a small bowl to lightly blend the yolks into the whites. Temper in the eggs by gradually adding some of the hot sauce. Carefully and slowly drizzle eggs into sauce as you whisk - you should have your saucepan on medium-low heat at this point. Add cheese in batches and mix until it melts. Let white sauce settle for a bit in pan before spreading evenly over meat sauce.

Bake in a preheated 350F oven for about an hour until top is lightly golden and inside bubbly. Allow to cool 10-to-15 minutes then cut into serving pieces.