

ALI'S KITCHEN

Making Moussaka Is Well Worth the Time

Mediterranean dish showcases ground beef or lamb, potatoes, eggplant, zucchini, and sauce

Column and photos by Ali Carter, Wisconsin Potato Growers Auxiliary

Moussaka is a Greek classic like lasagna. A savory casserole of layered meat and vegetables, this Mediterranean dish is made with ground beef or lamb, potatoes, grilled eggplant, zucchini, and topped with a creamy béchamel sauce.

I'll be honest with you, this is not a quick throw-together meal. There are steps, quite a few actually. But just like our American lasagna, Moussaka is worth the time spent, and with a bit of planning, it all ends up coming together without too much effort.

My suggestion is to begin with preparing the meat sauce. While the meat sauce is simmering, prep the potatoes, eggplant, and zucchini. Lastly, make the béchamel (this is not a sauce that holds well, so save it for the last step).

Assemble the layers of your moussaka in an 8x12" baking dish (or similar size), being sure to start with the potatoes as the bottom layer. They will create an ideal, sturdy base for the rest of the veggies. Once assembled, pop it in the oven until your moussaka is beautifully golden and crispy.

HOW TO LAYER MOUSSAKA

Tip: Keep the layers compact, being careful to avoid gaps between vegetable slices and overlapping as needed.

Layer in this order:

Potatoes – Sprinkled with cheese and a dash of salt and pepper

Zucchini – Placed in the opposite direction to the potatoes. Sprinkle with cheese, salt, and pepper.

Eggplant – Only use half. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.

Meat Sauce – Smoothed flat and gently pressed down to compress the veggies below it

Eggplant – Remaining eggplant is stacked in the opposite direction of the first layer. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.

Béchamel Sauce – Topped with the rest of the cheese

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INGREDIENTS: Beef Layer

- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 large onion, finely diced
- 2 cloves of garlic, finely diced
- 1.5 lbs. lean ground beef
- 3 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 cup beef stock
- 1/2 cup dry red wine (or substitute more beef stock)
- 1 Tbsp. dried thyme
- 1 Tbsp. dried oregano
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 tsp. allspice
- salt and pepper to taste
- large handful of fresh spinach leaves

See ingredients for veggie layers and Béchamel Sauce on next page!

DIRECTIONS

Beef Layer

Heat 1 Tbsp. olive oil in a large pan over medium heat. Add onion and cook until it begins to soften/brown, then add in garlic and cook an additional 1-2 minutes longer.

Add in beef, break up with a wooden spoon and cook until fully browned.

Once the meat is browned and the onions have softened, add the tomato paste, beef stock, red wine, all the spices, and toss in the spinach leaves. Mix well and cook, uncovered, at a low, gentle simmer for about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally until nice and thick.

Meanwhile, Prep the Veggie Layer

You'll want to get as much water out of the veggies as possible. To do this, place a few paper towels on the counter and your

eggplant slices on top. Rub a pinch of salt over both sides, then add a layer of paper towels on top.

On top of that, add the zucchini slices, followed by another layer of paper towel, followed by potato slices, and finished with another layer of paper towel. Gently press down to soak up the moisture.

Heat the olive oil in a large pan on the stove. Carefully start sliding in your potato slices and fry both sides until lightly golden and tender when poked with a fork.

Remove the potato slices and place on fresh paper towel (you may need to do this in batches).

Then fry the zucchini slices until softened and lightly browned. Once browned, place on a paper towel.

Finally, add additional olive oil to the pan, if needed, and fry the eggplant slices (again, you may need to do this in batches depending on the size of your pan). Remove and place on a paper towel.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Prepare the Béchamel Sauce

Melt the butter in a medium-size pot over medium heat. When the butter has completely melted, slowly whisk in the flour to create a paste. Simmer over medium-low heat for a few minutes.

Gradually whisk in the milk to create a thick sauce. Stir in the salt and nutmeg.

Remove the pot from the heat and stir in Pecorino until smooth and melted, then quickly whisk in the egg yolks. Stir 1/2 cup of the béchamel sauce into the beef.

Assemble the Moussaka

Place a layer of potato into the baking dish and sprinkle with a bit of Pecorino cheese and sprinkle with salt and pepper.

Follow with zucchini, sprinkled with cheese, salt, and pepper.

Then, layer half of the eggplant, sprinkled with a pinch of salt and pepper. Spread the beef sauce over the eggplant. Place down another layer using the rest of the eggplant.

Top all with the béchamel sauce, and finish with a sprinkling of Pecorino and place in the oven for 35-45 minutes, or until the top of the moussaka is golden brown.

Remove from the oven and allow the moussaka to sit for about 15-20 minutes before serving the casserole. This will help the moussaka keep its shape when you slice into it.

Enjoy! **BCT**

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INGREDIENTS: Veggie Layers

- 1 to 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 4 medium-sized eggplant, sliced lengthwise to create planks around 1/3" thick
- 2 to 3 Yukon gold (or other yellow potatoes), peeled and sliced around 1/4" thick
- 2 medium zucchinis, sliced lengthwise to create strips about 1/3" thick
- 1 cup Pecorino or any hard white grating cheese such as Parmesan (to sprinkle in between layers)

Béchamel Sauce

- 1 stick unsalted butter
- 1/2 cup flour
- 4 cups milk
- 1 cup freshly grated Pecorino Romano
- 3 egg yolks
- 1/2 tsp. ground nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp. salt, or to taste