

Seasonal Eating
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Celebrate the Olympics with Lasagna Rolls
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I'm not a huge sports fan although I do enjoy watching college football and PGA golf. But when the Olympics come around, I'm all in! There's something about national pride and rooting for the United States that makes me eager to watch all kinds of sports I never pay attention to at other times of the year.

So, since the winter Olympics are this month in Italy and it has been so cold outside here, let's celebrate in front of the television with the perfect, cozy, Italian comfort dish of Lasagna Rolls.

While lasagna is not technically a Milan dish but from a little further south in Italy, it is still representative of Italian dishes and perfect for cold winter days with its hearty pasta, rich meaty sauce and cheesy topping.



Lasagna rolls are the same flavors but easier to serve and quicker to bake in the oven. The pasta noodles are just slightly undercooked, slathered with a mixture of cheeses, spinach and meat sauce and then rolled up and covered under a blanket of meat sauce and melty cheese.

A couple of short cuts makes these easier and quicker to assemble. There are many good tomato pasta sauces already made and ready to use. Just jazz one them up with some aromatics like onion and garlic, some extra seasonings and browned ground beef for an easy sauce that doesn't take all day to cook down. Frozen spinach, well drained and pressed, is combined with ricotta, mozzarella and Parmesan cheeses for a hearty filling.

For assembly, boil the noodles about a minute under and lay them out on a sheet tray in layers with parchment paper between. Cook a couple of extra noodles just in case a few fall apart or tear. Pat them dry and then spread on a little of the cheese/spinach mixture and meat sauce and roll up. Place in a baking dish, lined with a little sauce, and then cover with the remaining sauce and more shredded cheese. This recipe makes 6 rolls, but you can double the recipe and put it in a 9"x13" pan for a larger group.

So, get ready to cheer our athletes on and bake up a pan of Lasagna Rolls to eat. For more information and recipes check out the Seasonal Eating page at bedford.tennessee.edu.

Lasagna Rolls

- 1/2 pound ground beef
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 4 ounces mushrooms, sliced
- 1 clove garlic, pressed
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 24 ounces jarred marinara sauce

8 lasagna noodles
8 ounces whole milk ricotta cheese
5 ounces frozen chopped spinach, thawed and liquid pressed out
1 egg
2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese, divided
1 cup grated Parmesan cheese, divided

In a saucepan, cook the ground beef until no longer pink. Drain off the excess fat. Add the onion, mushrooms, garlic, parsley, oregano and thyme and sauté until the onions and mushrooms are tender. Add the jarred marinara sauce and simmer a few minutes. In the meantime, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook the lasagna noodles until just tender, about a minute less than the box calls for (about 12 minutes or so). While the noodles are cooking, stir together the ricotta, spinach, egg, half the mozzarella and half the Parmesan.

Place some of the meat sauce in the bottom of a 9"x9" square baking dish. Drain the noodles and lay out on a parchment lined baking sheet. You can use two pans or put another layer of parchment and stack the noodles. Press the top side dry with a paper towel, if wet. Spread a couple of spoons of the spinach cheese mixture down each of 6 noodles and top with a couple of spoons of the meat sauce (you will have a couple of extra noodles just in case they fall apart or tear in the cooking process). Roll up. Place the rolls seam side down in the baking dish. Cover with the remaining meat sauce. Cover with foil and bake at 375 degrees for 30 minutes or until bubbly and hot. Remove the foil and top with the remaining Parmesan and mozzarella cheese. Place back in oven, uncovered for about 5 minutes until the cheese is melted. Sprinkle with a little more parsley and let stand a few minutes before serving.