



MAKE IT OR BAKE IT

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A baking challenge

Baking is the new unchained melody for urban women (and some men) in my opinion, of course for those who want or like to cook. Those days are long gone when mothers and grandmothers used to be in the kitchen sweating, huffing, puffing and fathers and uncles were in the living room entertaining guests.

I never understood the point of having people over and being in the kitchen. Entertaining also means speaking and laughing and spending quality time with the guests you invite.

Thanks to ovens and new-age ideas of simplistic eating, the days of confined cooking zones are over; we can now break free or should I say "bake free" with ongoing cooking.

The two recipes included here can create a great menu to entertain guests with the addition of a green salad.

MOUSSAKA

Ingredients:

- For the meat sauce-
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion (finely chopped)
- 2 cloves garlic (crushed)
- 1 kg mince beef
- 500g roma tomatoes (ripe)
- 3 tbsp tomato paste
- 3 tsp fresh parsley (chopped)
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- Salt
- Pepper

- For the layers-
- 4 medium aubergines or 4 zucchinis
- Olive oil
- 63g cheese (cheddar will do)
- 2 eggs (lightly beaten)
- Bread crumbs
- For the Béchamel sauce -
- 90g butter
- 75g plain flour
- 800ml milk
- ¼ tsp ground nutmeg
- 63 ml kefalograviera cheese (or parmesan)
- Salt
- Pepper

Method:

To make Béchamel sauce -
Melt butter in a heavy saucepan, stir in flour and cook gently for 2 minutes. Warm milk a little while flour and butter are cooking off. Add milk gradually, stirring constantly with a whisk or a flat bottomed wooden spoon until all the milk is added. Continue to stir until boiling. Boil gently for 2 minutes, remove from heat, stir in nutmeg, cheese and seasonings to taste. Cover the sauce and get on with the following steps -

To make meat sauce -
Put oil and onion in a large saucepan and cook on medium heat until softened. Add garlic, cook a few seconds, and then add mince meat. Increase heat and cook, stirring often, until colour changes. Add the tomato paste (grate tomatoes, halve and squeeze out some of the seeds, discard skins, make paste) and cook off for another minute or so before adding remaining meat

sauce ingredients. Season to taste and simmer gently, stirring regularly, on low heat for 40 minutes. Sauce should not be runny.

To prepare aubergines -
Wash aubergines, remove stems and cut



into 5mm slices. I do not use the first and last slice which is mainly skin.

Place a layer of aubergine slices on a baking tray, brush each side with oil and cook under a pre-heated grill until lightly browned on each side. Remove to a plate and continue with remaining aubergine.

To assemble Moussaka -

Brush oven dish with oil. Place a layer of aubergine in the base, top with half of the meat sauce. Remove cover from Béchamel sauce and whisk in the eggs. Pour sauce

over meat sauce, spreading evenly. Shred cheese on top.

Sprinkle breadcrumb lightly to finish it up and bake in pre-heated moderate oven, for 45-50 minutes until top is golden brown. Stand Moussaka for at least 10 minutes before serving.

Time saver's guide:

The Béchamel sauce and meat sauce can be refrigerated for at least one week once made. Just remember to cool it down before putting it into the fridge. For the Béchamel sauce it's better to use a glass or ceramic container.

CHEESE CAKE WITH LEMON SYRUP

Ingredients:

- For the filling -
- 350g cream cheese, softened
- 500g ricotta (home-made "chaana" will do too)
- 4 eggs
- 1 ½ cups caster sugar
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 1 tbsp spoon grated lemon rind
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- 1 ½ tbsp spoon corn flour
- 1 ½ tbsp spoon water
- For the base -
- 1 ½ cup almond meal (ground almonds)
- 1 ¾ cup all-purpose
- 1 ¼ cup caster sugar
- 90g butter, roughly chopped