

CopyCat O'Charley's Baked Penne Italiano

Ingredients

3 tablespoons Extra Virgin Olive Oil
2 cloves Garlic smashed
1 pound Hot or sweet Italian Fennel Sausage of choice, casings removed
One 28-ounce can Tomato Purée
1 1/2 cups Water
1 1/2 teaspoons Sugar
1 Bay Leaf
1/4 teaspoon ground Fennel
Salt and freshly ground Black Pepper to taste
1 pound Penne Pasta
3 cups creamy Ricotta Cheese
1/2 pound fresh Mozzarella Cheese cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1/4 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano Cheese

Directions

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Prepare pasta according to package directions. Drain. Return pasta to the pot and set aside.

Add 1 tablespoon oil to a large saucepan. Place over medium heat.

Add garlic. Cook, stirring, until lightly browned, about 1 minute.

Add sausage. Cook, breaking up the meat, until browned, about 8 minutes. Add tomato purée, water, sugar, bay leaf and fennel.

Season with salt and pepper, to taste.

Bring to a boil. Simmer over low heat until thickened, about 30 minutes. Remove garlic. Mash it to a paste and stir it back into the sauce. Discard the bay leaf.

To pasta, stir in the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil.

Using a slotted spoon, add cooked sausage to the pasta.

Then add 1 cup of the tomato sauce. Toss to coat the penne.

Spoon pasta mixture into a 9-by-13-inch baking dish.

Pour remaining tomato sauce mixture over the pasta.

Dollop large spoonfuls of the creamy ricotta on top. Gently fold some of the ricotta into the pasta, don't over mix, you should have pockets of ricotta.

Scatter mozzarella on top. Sprinkle with the Parmigiano-Reggiano.

Place in preheated oven. Bake for about 45 minutes, or until bubbling and golden on top.

Remove from oven. Let rest for 20 minutes before serving.