

## Lasagne with Mushrooms and Ham

Two 6/8 ounces packages imported dried boletus mushrooms or if loose, no less than 1 ½ ounces  
1 ½ pounds fresh, firm cultivated mushrooms  
¼ cup vegetable oil  
6 tablespoons butter  
1/3 cup onion chopped very fine  
1/3 cup canned Italian plum tomatoes drained and chopped  
2 tablespoons chopped parsley  
salt  
freshly ground black pepper  
1 to 1 ¼ cups unbleached flour  
2 large eggs  
Béchamel sauce (made with 2 cups milk, 4 tablespoons butter, 3 tablespoons flour, ¼ teaspoons salt)  
¾ pounds boiled unsmoked ham, cut into thin strips  
2/3 cups freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus additional for the table  
freshly made lasagne noodles

Soak the dried mushrooms for at least 30 minutes in a small bowl with 2 cups of lukewarm water. After the soaking lift them out carefully without stirring up the water in the bowl and rinse them in several changes of water to rid them of any remaining grit. Chop them into large pieces and set aside for later.

Filter the water in which the mushrooms have soaked through a wire strainer lined with a paper towel. Reserve for later.

Rinse the fresh mushrooms rapidly under cold running water. Drain well and wipe thoroughly dry with a soft towel or paper towels. Cut them into thin lengthwise slices without detaching the caps.

Choose a sauté pan large enough to accommodate later all the fresh mushrooms without crowding. Put in the oil, 4 tablespoons butter, the chopped onion and turn on the heat to medium.

When the onion becomes translucent, put in the reconstituted wild mushrooms, the filtered water in which they soaked, the chopped tomatoes and the parsley. Stir well and cover the pan with the cover slightly ajar. Turn the heat down to medium low.

When the liquid in the pan has evaporated, put in the sliced fresh mushrooms and turn up the heat to high. Add salt and a grinding of pepper. Cook uncovered, always at lively heat, stirring frequently, for 7 to 8 minutes until all the liquid thrown off by the fresh mushrooms has evaporated. Turn off the heat and taste and correct for salt and pepper. Set aside for later.

Prepare the pasta dough using either the hand method or the machine. Cut it into lasagne strips and parboil. (The instructions that follow here are from another recipe: "Set a bowl of cold water near the range and lay some clean, dry cloth towel flat on a work counter. Bring 4 quarts water to a rapid boil, add 1 t salt, and put in 2 or 3 pasta strips. Cook the pasta very briefly, just a few seconds after the water returns to a boil. Retrieve it with a slotted spatula or colander scoop, plunge it into the bowl of cold water, then take the pasta strips one by one and rinse rubbing them under cold running water. Squeeze each strip gently, then lay it out flat on the towel to dry. Cook all the pasta in this fashion, no more than 2 or 3 strips at a time and when it is all laid out on the towel, pat it completely dry with another towel.

***Explanatory note:*** All this washing and wringing and drying of pasta is tedious indeed, but it is necessary and if you understand why you must do it the procedure may seem less irksome. You first dip the pasta in cold water to stop the cooking instantly. This is important because if lasagne are not kept very firm at this state they will become horrible mushy later on when they are baked. And you must rinse off their surface starch before laying them out to dry or they will become glued to the towel and tear apart when you are ready to pick them up.)

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Make the béchamel sauce. Keep it warm by leaving it in the upper half of a double boiler with the heat turned very low. Do not worry if a film forms on top; just stir it before using it later. Any tiny lumps that may form will dissolve while the lasagne are baking.

Thickly smear the bottom of the lasagne pan with butter. Line the bottom of the pan with a single layer of pasta. Cut the strips of pasta to fit the pan, overlap them slightly, but no more than ¼ inch.

Spread a thinly distributed layer of mushrooms over the pasta. It is not necessary to cover every square inch of the pasta with mushrooms. Spread some béchamel very thin over the mushrooms. Scatter a few strips of sliced ham over this; then sprinkle with a little Parmesan cheese. Cover with another layer of pasta and repeat the sequence. Continue building up the layers of pasta and filling until you reach a maximum of 6 layers of pasta. Over the topmost layer of pasta, spread a little bit of béchamel, sprinkle with some cheese and dot with 2 tablespoons butter.

Place the pan in the uppermost level of the preheated oven. Bake for 10 to 15 minutes, until a light golden crust forms on top. If after 10 minutes there is no crust beginning to form, raise the oven temperature another 50 to 75 degrees for the next five minutes.

After removing the lasagne from the oven, allow them to rest for at least 10 minutes before serving. Serve directly from the pan with a little extra grated cheese available on the side.

I frequently omit the ham for vegetarian guests in this recipe is from Marcella Hazan "More Classic Italian Cooking" 1978. Her first two cookbooks were issued in paperback in the 1970's ("The Classic Italian Cookbook" 1973) and combined to make a hardback "The Classic Italian Cook Book" in 1980, but the hardback doesn't have all the recipes of the two paperbacks, such as this recipe. If you have none of her books -- that's very sad, but can be easily rectified -- you need to know she is opinionated about most things and one example is: lasagna is never, never, never made with dried lasagna from a box in the American abomination; the pasta must be fresh. And the Explanatory notes are one more reason why the book the priceless. With Marcella Hazan you certainly never have the modern worry, "Were these recipes tested by anyone?" KT