

Cheesy Baked Meat Balls in Marinara

Who doesn't love meatballs? I'd venture to say that some vegetarians have dreams about them. I made dozens and dozens of them trying to get this recipe perfect. We had spaghetti with meatballs, meatball sandwiches, meatballs in the refrigerator, meatballs in the freezer. But all of this hard work paid off. I believe this is one of the best meatballs you are ever going to eat, maybe even better than your Italian Nana makes (but don't tell her—you might hurt her feelings—or she might have your cousin Guido come after me). This recipe is perfect as an appetizer, or for those on Keto diets, or atop spaghetti.

I like my meatballs baked, though you may pan fry them in oil if you prefer, which will yield a darker, crustier exterior. A mini muffin pan is ideal for baking; providing for even cooking. If you do not have one, a baking sheet works just fine. Buon appetito!

4-6 servings

Meatball Ingredients:

2 slices of white bread—crusts removed—torn into tiny pieces

4 ounces buttermilk

1 pound ground chuck—chilled (see Frankie's Tips)

1/2 pound ground pork—chilled

1/2 cup finely grated Parmesan Cheese

3 tablespoons fresh Italian parsley—minced

2 large egg yolk

3-4 cloves—finely minced garlic

1 teaspoon salt

ground black pepper—several twists

Other Ingredients:

Half recipe of Frankie's Marinara (or one jar of your favorite store bought)

4 ounces of provolone or mozzarella—shredded (or cut into circles if sliced)

Extra parsley for garnish

Preparing the Meatballs:

1. Combine the crust-less bread and buttermilk in a shallow bowl. Allow to soak for 10 minutes, mashing occasionally with a fork until it forms a smooth paste.
2. Preheat oven to 400° F.
3. Spray mini muffin tin with non-stick cooking spray (preferably olive oil or canola). Note—if using a baking pan you can either spray the pan with non-stick cooking spray or use a Silpat baking mat.
4. Place all remaining meatball ingredients in a medium mixing bowl. Add the bread-buttermilk mixture and combine with your hands until well incorporated.
5. This recipe should yield 12 or more meatballs, depending on how big you want them. Divide the meat in four sections, and then divide each section by three (or you can weigh them out at 2.5 to 3 ounces each).
6. Use the palms of your hands to shape the meatballs into rounds and place in individual muffin tin cups.
7. Bake meatballs for 18 minutes. Check temperature to ensure they have reached at least 165 F.

Final Preparation:

1. Preheat broiler (low option is fine if you have it).
2. Warm your marinara sauce in a deep skillet.
3. Place baked meatballs in sauce. Top with cheese.
4. Place under broiler until cheese is melted and slightly browned.



Suggested Wine: *Barbera*

Barbera, which comes from Piedmont, is considered by many to be the penultimate pizza and pasta wine. It is naturally low in tannins and high in acidity, giving it a juicy character which matches well with tomato sauce dishes. This version, designated as 'Superiore', gets a little more oak aging than a traditional Barbera; thus it has a little more body and structure.

Frankie's recommendation: *Carlin d'Paolo Barbera d'Asti Superiore*

Frankie's Tips:

- ◆ This recipe is easy to double. Meatballs freeze extremely well so that you can have them later for pasta or meatball sandwiches.
- ◆ Keep your meat chilled until ready to mix. Room temperature meat will be very mushy and the meatballs will not hold their shape well; besides which you will run a higher risk of food borne illness. Also make certain meatballs are cooked to at least 165° F, as tested with a thermometer.
- ◆ When mixing the meat with other ingredients, do not mix anymore than necessary because that will make the meat tougher.
- ◆ I tried several combinations of meat and really liked the 2 to 1 ratio of ground beef to pork. I tried veal in the recipe but found the meatballs to be bland. Unless you go to a meat counter which has bulk ground meats, you'll likely have to buy a whole pound of ground pork. Save the extra for meatloaf or for making sausage.
- ◆ A great alternative is to substitute ground lamb instead of pork for a richer flavor. You can also make the meatballs from ground chicken if you want a healthier alternative. It tends to be softer, so refrigerate the mix for an hour before cooking.