

Make Ahead Italian Sausage and Pasta Bake

- 1 1/2 lbs Italian sausage (mild or hot)
- olive oil (optional)
- 2 onions, coarsely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 large sweet red pepper, coarsely chopped
- 28 ounces meatless extra chunky pasta sauce
- 213 ml can tomato sauce
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 1 teaspoon fennel seed
- 5 cups penne pasta
- 1 (284 g) package fresh spinach (trimmed and coarsely chopped)
- 3 cups shredded provolone cheese or 3 cups mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup grated asiago cheese or 1 cup parmesan cheese

DIRECTIONS

1. Cut sausage into 1/2 inch chunks. In large skillet, brown sausage over medium-high heat, in batches and adding oil if necessary. Transfer sausage to a bowl.
2. Pour off any fat from pan. Add onions, garlic and red pepper, cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, for about 5 minutes or until softened. Stir in pasta sauce, tomato sauce, basil, oregano and fennel seeds; bring to a boil, stirring and scraping up any brown bits from bottom of pan. Return sausage and any accumulated juices to pan; cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until sausage is firm throughout.
3. Meanwhile, in a large pot of boiling salted water, cook pasta for 6 minutes, add spinach; cook for 1 minute. Drain well and return to pot. Add sausage mixture and provolone/mozzarella cheese; stir to combine well.
4. Transfer to 2 greased 8-inch square baking dishes or 1 13x9-inch dish. Sprinkle with Asiago/parmesan cheese. Cover dish with greased foil, greased side down.
5. To serve: Bake, covered with foil, in 375 degree F. oven for 30 minutes or for 1 hour if from the refrigerator. This freezes beautifully (thaw in refrigerator before baking).