

Vegetarian Meatballs with Fresh Herbed Tomato Sauce



Ingredients:

For the sauce:

1 large can tomato puree
1 large can tomato sauce
4 Roma tomatoes
3 cloves garlic
3 Red bell peppers
1 Poblano pepper
1 large yellow onion, quartered
1 cup spicy tomato juice
1/2 cup fresh basil leaves, torn
1/2 cup fresh parsley, torn
1/2 cup fresh oregano leaves, stems removed
1/2 cup fresh thyme leaves, stems removed
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon crushed red pepper flakes
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper

For the Meatballs:

8 cloves of garlic
4 carrots, roughly chopped
4 stalks celery, roughly chopped
1 lb. baby Portobello mushrooms, roughly chopped
1 large yellow onion, roughly chopped
2 cups cooked lentils
2 cups panko breadcrumbs
1 cup packed fresh basil leaves
1 cup packed fresh parsley
1 cup packed fresh oregano
1/2 cup all egg whites whisked with 1/4 cup 2 olive oil
1/2 cup olive oil
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Garnishes:

1/2 cup fresh basil pesto
1/4 cup fresh parsley, finely chopped

Directions:

For the sauce:

1) Set your oven to broil and line a large baking sheet with aluminum foil.

- 2) Place the tomatoes, garlic, peppers, and onion on the sheet and place the sheet in the oven 2 to 3 inches away from the oven's heating element.
- 3) Roast the vegetables until they are charred, turning them as they cook about 10 to 12 minutes.
- 4) Remove the sheet from the oven and place the tomatoes and peppers in a bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and steam the vegetables for 15 minutes. Chop the onions and garlic.
- 5) When cooled, peel the skin from the tomatoes and for the peppers remove both the skin and the seeds. Chop the vegetables and set aside.
- 6) Heat the olive oil in a deep soup pot on the stove over medium-high heat until shimmering.
- 7) Add the vegetables and cook for one minute until heated through.
- 8) Add the fresh herbs and cook for 2 minutes until fragrant.
- 9) Stir in the tomato sauce, tomato puree and the tomato juice, red pepper flakes, and season the sauce with salt and pepper.
- 10) Reduce the heat to medium-low and cover the sauce. Simmer for 30 to 45 minutes.
- 11) Using either an immersion blender or a standing blender, blend the sauce until smooth and adjust the seasonings as needed. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 20 to 25 minutes.

For the meatballs:

- 1) Preheat your oven to 400 degrees.
- 2) Line a large baking sheet with aluminum foil and spread the cloves of garlic, mushrooms, carrots, celery, and onion on the baking sheet. Season with salt and pepper and drizzle the olive oil over the vegetables.
- 3) Place the baking sheet in the oven and roast the vegetables for 35 minutes until tender.
- 4) Remove the pan from the oven and set the vegetables aside to cool.
- 5) When the vegetables have cooled, place them in the bowl of a food processor and add the fresh basil, parsley, and oregano. Pulse the ingredients until they are chopped and fully incorporated.
- 6) Put the cooked lentils in a large mixing bowl and add the pureed vegetables, egg mixture, and breadcrumbs. Mix all ingredients together.
- 7) Using the same baking sheet you used to roast the vegetables, take an ice cream scoop and measure out full scoops full of the meatball mixture. Transfer the meatballs to the baking sheet.
- 8) Place the baking sheet in the oven at 400 degrees and bake the meatballs for 12 to 15 minutes until firm yet still slightly springy when touched.
- 9) Remove the pan from the oven.

10) To serve, ladle the tomato sauce into deep soup bowls and place three meatballs on top of the sauce. Garnish with the fresh basil pesto and chopped parsley.