

Turkey and Eggplant Pastitsio

When we get a craving for Greek food in the fall and winter, there's only one thing to be done, either Pastitsio (sort of a Greek macaroni and cheese) or moussaka ...this is the macaroni and cheese favourite. The sauce can easily be made a day or two ahead and that's what I do. I adapted the recipe from an old "Gourmet" magazine. You can use lamb, beef or veal but I wanted to "lighten" things up!

Makes 6 – 8 Servings

For the Turkey Sauce:

1 large onion, chopped
2 Tbsp. EVOO
1 lb. ground turkey
1 large clove garlic, minced
1 ½ tsp. salt
1 tsp. dried oregano, crumbled
½ tsp. cinnamon
¼ tsp. pepperoncino (chili flakes)
¼ tsp. sugar
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 lb. eggplant, cut into ½" cubes
28 – 32 oz. tin crushed tomatoes

For the Cheese Sauce:

2 Tbsp. unsalted butter
2 Tbsp. unbleached flour
2 cups homogenized milk
1 garlic clove, lightly crushed
1 whole garlic clove
½ lb. Greek feta cheese, crumbled, preferably Dodonis
¼ to ½ tsp. salt, or to taste
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
2 large eggs, room temperature, beaten

For the Pasta:

10 oz. penne or ziti

Butter or spray with non-cooking spray a 3 quart baking dish & set aside.

Place the cubes of eggplant into a colander & salt with approximately 2 tsp. salt. Set the colander over a bowl to catch any drips & allow to stand up to 1 hour.

Heat approximately ¼ cup EVOO in a large saute pan over medium-high heat. In the meantime rinse the eggplant with cold water & drain on a large kitchen towel, pressing out any water. When the oil is hot/shimmering but not smoking, saute half the eggplant. When it is golden/lightly browned, remove to a rimmed baking sheet that has been lined with a few layers of paper towels. Remove the eggplant from the pan onto the paper towels with a spider or slotted spoon & saute the remaining eggplant in the same way. Remove the pan from the heat and allow to cool. Wipe clean when cool and use to make the turkey sauce.

Make the Turkey Sauce:

Saute the onion in EVOO over moderately low heat, stirring, until softened, 5 minutes or so. Raise the heat to medium-high & add the turkey, saute, stirring & breaking up lumps until no longer pink, about 5 minutes. Add garlic, saute a minute or so add the peperoncino stir for 30 seconds then add the salt, oregano, cinnamon, sugar & pepper & saute, stirring for 2 minutes. Stir in the eggplant & tomatoes & gently simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, for 30 minutes. Remove lid & simmer, stirring occasionally, until the sauce is thickened, about 15 minutes longer; season with salt & pepper to taste.

Preheat the oven to 425 F.

Make the Cheese Sauce & Cook the Pasta:

While turkey sauce is simmering, make cheese sauce & cook the pasta.

If turkey sauce has been done ahead, bring a large pot of water to a boil, add 1 – 2 Tbsp. salt then the pasta and cook until al dente or a couple of minutes less than when it is fully cooked. Drain & set aside.

Make the cheese sauce by melting butter in a 2 qt. heavy saucepan over moderate heat, then stir in flour & cook, stirring for 2 minutes. Whisk in the milk, add the garlic & the clove & bring to a boil, still over moderate heat. Reduce heat & simmer, whisking occasionally, for 5 minutes OR...see my microwave method for doing this bit.

Remove the garlic & the clove; add the feta, salt & pepper & cook, whisking well, until cheese is well incorporated. Gradually whisk the cheese sauce into the eggs by tablespoonfuls.

Toss half the pasta with the turkey sauce & the remaining half of the pasta with the cheese sauce.

Assemble the Pastitsio:

Pour the pasta with turkey sauce into the prepared baking dish. Spoon the pasta with cheese sauce over top, spreading evenly.

Bake pastitsio, uncovered, in middle of preheated oven until bubbling & top is golden, 25 – 30 minutes. Let stand at least 5 minutes before serving.

****To see how do make the base for the cheese sauce in the microwave, click here.**