Italian Meatballs

Make-ahead · Serves a crowd · Makes 16–20 large meatballs (serves 8–10)

Ken's note: TBD

Big, tender beef-and-pork meatballs, browned and simmered in a thick tomato sauce. The milk-soaked bread keeps them moist. Serve over pasta, in subs, or with crusty bread.

Ingredients

Meatballs

- 4 cups torn soft white bread, crusts removed
- 2 cups whole milk
- 2 lb ground beef (80–85% lean)
- 2 lb ground pork
- 1 small onion, grated
- 8 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ cup chopped parsley
- 3–4 Tbsp chopped basil (optional)
- 1½–2 cups grated Parmigiano Reggiano or Pecorino
- 4 eggs
- 2 Tbsp kosher salt (Diamond Crystal; use 4 tsp if Morton)
- 2 tsp black pepper
- 2 tsp dried oregano
- 1–2 tsp red pepper flakes (optional)
- Olive oil, for browning

Tomato sauce

- 6 Tbsp olive oil
- 10–12 garlic cloves, sliced
- ¼ cup tomato paste
- 1–1½ cups dry red wine
- 4 cans (28 oz) whole San Marzano tomatoes, crushed by hand
- 2 tsp dried oregano
- 1–2 tsp red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1 tsp black pepper
- Handful of basil, torn
- 1–2 tsp sugar, only if the sauce is sharp

To serve

- 2 lb spaghetti, rigatoni, or penne, or hoagie rolls with provolone for subs

Method

1. Soak the bread in the milk for 5–10 minutes and mash it to a paste. Gently mix the beef, pork, onion, garlic, herbs, cheese, salt, pepper, oregano, and pepper flakes. Add the bread paste and eggs and mix until just combined; the mixture should be soft and a little sticky. Fry a small patty to check the seasoning. Shape into 4–5 oz balls (tennis-ball size) on parchment-lined pans and chill 20–30 minutes.
2. Make the sauce. Warm the oil in a large Dutch oven and cook the garlic about 2 minutes, without browning. Stir in the tomato paste for 1–2 minutes, add the wine, and simmer 2–3 minutes. Add the tomatoes, oregano, pepper flakes, and pepper. Simmer gently, partly covered, 45–90 minutes, until thick. Stir in the basil. Taste and salt at the end.
3. Brown the meatballs in a film of olive oil, in batches, 10–12 minutes per batch, until deeply golden. Nestle them in the simmering sauce, partly cover, and cook gently 40–55 minutes, turning once or twice, until 165°F inside.
4. Serve 2–3 meatballs per person with sauce and extra cheese. For subs, split the meatballs, pile into toasted rolls with sauce and provolone, and broil briefly.
5. Make ahead: the mixture keeps 24 hours in the fridge before shaping. Raw or cooked meatballs freeze up to 3 months.