



Spinach & Ricotta Cannelloni

Spinach & Ricotta Cannelloni is an easy dish that can be prepared a few hours ahead of time, then just put in the oven at the last minute ... perfect for casual entertaining. I use Barilla cannelloni tubes that don't need to be cooked before filling, the moisture from the sauce softens them as they bake, just be sure it says 'no pre-cook' (or similar) on the pack. I've also used this filling with conchiglioni (large shell-shaped pasta) for an unusual dinner party entrée, though they must be boiled before filling. If ricotta is very fresh it contains a lot of liquid, so leave it in a strainer for an hour or so to drain, I use the one from Vannella Cheese in Sydney. Disposable piping bags, available from kitchenware shops, make filling the tubes easy. I like a soft red with this, such as the pinot noir from Lark Hill, a biodynamic winery in the Canberra District of NSW - though a gamay or Beaujolais would be great too.

Serves 6

INGREDIENTS

- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for oiling
- 500g baby spinach
- Salt flakes and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 600g ricotta cheese, drained
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- Freshly grated nutmeg, to taste
- 1 cup freshly grated parmesan
- 24 (250g) cannelloni tubes
- Green salad, for serving

Tomato Sauce

- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2 red onions, finely diced
- Salt flakes, to taste
- 800g Italian canned tomatoes, chopped
- ¼ cup basil leaves, finely sliced

METHOD

1. Make Tomato Sauce: place oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir in onion and salt, cover and cook for about 10 minutes, until soft. Stir in tomato, crush well with a potato masher or wooden spoon and bring to the boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes then stir in basil and set aside.
2. Preheat oven to 180°C.
3. Heat oil in a large, high-sided frying pan over low heat. Add spinach and salt, cover and cook for 5-10 minutes, stirring frequently, until spinach is thoroughly wilted. Depending on the size of your pan, you may need to add spinach in batches as each lot wilts a little to make room for more.
4. Tip spinach into a sieve and set aside to cool enough to handle. Squeeze to remove as much excess liquid as possible, then chop roughly.
5. Combine well with ricotta, egg, nutmeg, salt, pepper and half the parmesan.
6. Oil the bottom of a baking dish and cover with one third of the Tomato Sauce.
7. Using a piping bag, pipe the ricotta mixture into the cannelloni tubes, arranging them in the dish in a single layer.
8. Pour remaining sauce over the top, pressing them down gently, if necessary, so they are all covered with sauce.
9. Sprinkle with remaining parmesan and bake for 40 minutes.
10. Serve with a green salad.