



### **Best Baked Spaghetti**

The first time I was served this casserole, I unashamedly had three helpings. The merlot makes it rich and mellow, while the oregano contributes fragrance and flavor. You can divide the cheese as you like, to put more throughout or on top – we love the browned-yet-tender topping that it forms. This freezes well, and the leftovers are great, too.

- 1 lb ground beef**
- 1 medium onion, chopped or 1 Tbl dried onion**
- 1 clove garlic, chopped**
- 3 (8-oz) cans tomato sauce**
- 1/2 c merlot or Burgundy wine (Burgundy gives a deeper flavor but most reds will work)**
- 1 tsp dried oregano**
- 1/2 tsp dried parsley, *optional***
- 1 Tbl sugar**
- 1/2 tsp salt**
- 1/2 c grated American cheese, about 4 slices, or 1/2 c grated mild Cheddar cheese**
- 1/2 pound dry thin spaghetti, broken in half**

*Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Baking time 45 minutes.*

In a large no-stick frying pan or Dutch oven, sauté meat, onion and garlic. Add tomato sauce, wine, oregano, parsley, sugar and salt. Simmer, covered, 1 hour, stirring occasionally. (It really makes a difference if you can take this amount of time! Otherwise, 20 minutes will serve to heat everything.)

Cook spaghetti as usual and drain. Put half the spaghetti in a greased 3-quart casserole, then add half the sauce and 1/4 cup of the grated cheese. Add the remaining spaghetti and sauce, and stir everything together with a large spoon. Sprinkle the remaining cheese on top.

At this point, the ingredients are all cooked, so it could be eaten as is, but it's much better if you bake it (covered) at 350 degrees for 45 minutes -- the cheese turns a wonderful brown and the flavor is absorbed throughout. Serves six to eight.