

Spaghetti and Meatballs

When Lady and the Tramp go to the Italian restaurant, Tony's, in the Disney classic *Lady and the Tramp*, the dingy back alley becomes the setting for one of the most divine dates in cinema history. Between the candle glowing in a wine bottle, breadsticks propped up in a basket, the handwritten menu and the gingham tablecloth blowing in the breeze, it all looks pretty dreamy. There's a good reason why spaghetti and meatballs is a classic in the canon of romantic dishes - it's one that's simply best shared.

Spaghetti with meatballs is all about the balance of the almost-sweet tomato sauce and the intense savouriness of the spicy meatballs. You can pan-fry the meatballs before popping them in the sauce, but the sheer ease and convenience of putting them in the oven to crisp on the outside can't be beaten. Make the meatballs in advance, if you fancy, then just poach them in the sauce before serving.

350g (12oz) lean minced (ground) pork

a splash of olive oil, plus extra for greasing

½ large white onion, finely chopped

½ tsp dried chilli flakes (crushed red pepper flakes)

1 tsp fennel seeds

⅛ tsp freshly ground nutmeg

2 garlic cloves, finely minced

1 slice of white bread, about 50g (1¾oz)

100ml (6½ tbsp) whole milk

1 egg, lightly whisked

2 tbsp finely chopped flat-leaf parsley

1½ tsp sea salt

1 recipe quantity Tomato Sauce (see p.146)

250g dried spaghetti

2 tbsp finely grated Parmesan cheese

basil leaves, to serve

Start by making the meatballs. Put the pork in a large mixing bowl and set aside.

Pour a splash of olive oil into a large sauté pan on a medium heat, add the onion, chilli, fennel seeds and nutmeg and cook for a few minutes until the onion is soft and translucent. Stir in the garlic and cook for another minute until fragrant, then take the pan off the heat and let the onion mix cool.

Toast the bread until deep golden, then place in a shallow bowl and pour the milk over. Let the toast soak until softened, then roughly tear into small pieces and add to the bowl containing the pork. Mix in the egg, cooled onion mix, parsley and salt.

Using a tablespoon, scoop out even-sized balls of the pork mix and roll each one in your hands to make 25–30 tiny meatballs, then place on an oiled or lined tray and chill for at least 1 hour.

When you're ready to cook, heat the oven to 180°C fan (400°F/Gas 6). Place the meatballs, spaced out on a lined baking tray, and bake for 25 minutes, until golden brown.

Meanwhile, start the tomato sauce, following the instructions on page 147. Once the meatballs are cooked, transfer them to the sauce and simmer with the lid off for a further 20 minutes, until they take on the flavour of the sauce.

While the sauce is simmering, cook the spaghetti in a big pot of boiling salted water following the packet instructions, then drain and add to the sauce. Toss until combined and serve piled into 2 bowls, topped with the Parmesan and basil leaves.

