

Bite Spoon

Nonna's Homemade Italian Meatballs Recipe

25 min Prep time	**1 h** Cook time	**1 h 25 min** Total time
6 Servings	**Medium** Difficulty	**Italian** Cuisine

Ingredients

For the Meatballs

- [ ] 1 lb ground beef (80/20)
- [ ] 1/2 lb ground lamb
- [ ] 1 cup fresh breadcrumbs
- [ ] 1/2 cup whole milk
- [ ] 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- [ ] 3/4 cup freshly grated Pecorino Romano cheese, plus more for serving
- [ ] 1/2 cup chopped fresh Italian parsley
- [ ] 3 cloves garlic, minced
- [ ] 1 tsp salt
- [ ] 1/2 tsp black pepper
- [ ] 1/4 cup olive oil, for frying

For the Tomato Sauce

- [ ] 2 tbsp olive oil
- [ ] 1 small onion, finely diced
- [ ] 3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- [ ] 1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes (preferably San Marzano)
- [ ] 1 tsp dried oregano
- [ ] A handful of fresh basil leaves
- [ ] Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

1. First, let's create our 'panade'—the secret to tender meatballs. In a large mixing bowl, combine the fresh breadcrumbs and the milk. Gently stir them together and let them sit for about 10 minutes. You'll see the breadcrumbs absorb the milk and become soft and paste-like. To this bowl, add the ground beef, ground lamb, beaten egg, grated Pecorino Romano, chopped parsley, minced garlic, salt, and pepper. Using your hands, mix everything together very gently until it's just combined. Please, don't overwork it! Over-mixing is the enemy of a tender meatball. Then, with damp hands, roll the mixture into golf ball-sized meatballs, about 1 1/2 inches in diameter. You should get around 24 meatballs.

2. Now for the sauce. In a large Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed pot, warm the 2 tablespoons of olive oil over medium heat. Add the finely diced onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until it's soft and translucent, which usually takes about 5-7 minutes. Add the sliced garlic and cook for just another minute until you can smell its beautiful aroma—be careful not to let it burn. Pour in the crushed tomatoes, add the oregano, and season with a bit of salt and pepper. Bring the sauce to a simmer, then reduce the heat to low, and let it gently bubble while you cook the meatballs.

3 It's time to give the meatballs that gorgeous brown crust. In a large skillet (I prefer cast iron for this), heat the 1/4 cup of olive oil over medium-high heat. The oil should shimmer slightly when it's ready. Carefully place half of the meatballs in the skillet, leaving some space between them so they sear instead of steam. Brown them on all sides, turning them gently, for about 5-6 minutes in total. They don't need to be cooked through at this point. Transfer the browned meatballs to a plate and repeat with the remaining meatballs.

4 Gently nestle the browned meatballs into the simmering tomato sauce in your Dutch oven. They should be mostly submerged. Tear the fresh basil leaves and scatter them into the sauce. Cover the pot and let everything simmer together on low heat for at least 45 minutes, or up to an hour and a half if you have the time. The longer they simmer, the more tender they'll become and the more the flavors will meld together. Serve them hot, spooned over your favorite pasta like a classic spaghetti or even a lovely courgette pasta, with a generous sprinkle of extra Pecorino Romano cheese on top. It's just divine.

Nutrition per serving

450 kcal	28 g	15 g	30 g
Calories	Protein	Carbs	Fat

Tips & notes

- The quality of your tomatoes really matters for the sauce. If you can find them, San Marzano tomatoes have a wonderful sweetness and low acidity that makes for a truly spectacular sauce. It's a small detail that elevates the entire dish.
- Don't be afraid to make a double batch of these! They freeze beautifully. I often make extra and freeze the cooked meatballs (with a bit of sauce) in portion-sized containers for a quick and comforting meal on a busy night. It feels like such a gift to my future self.
- If your sauce gets a little too thick during the long simmer, you can add a splash of water or the starchy pasta water if you're cooking pasta to serve with it. The pasta water not only thins the sauce but also helps it cling to the noodles beautifully.