

Grandma Marsala's Sunday Gravy with Meatballs

Serves 8 hungry Sicilians, or those who want to be Sicilians.

Ingredients for the sauce:

1 pound beef short ribs, dried of all moisture
1 pound italian sausage
2 ounces of tomato paste
3 28-ounce cans of whole or chopped stewed tomatoes
1 cup of dry red wine (whatever you're serving with dinner)
2 cups of water
4 cloves of garlic (whole)
5 large fresh basil leaves (Don't use dried herbs with this meal, please. Do it for Grandma.)
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper

Ingredients for the meatballs:

1/2 pound ground beef (Don't get the lean stuff. 20% fat is fine.)
1/2 pound ground pork
1/2 cup bread crumbs
1/2 cup parmesan
2 eggs
1 teaspoon chopped or minced garlic
2 tablespoons of fresh parsley, chopped (Again, please - fresh.)
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper

Oh, and . . .

Olive oil
Pasta (Whatever you like - shells, noodles, whatever you want to have. Get fresh if you can.)

Pour yourself a glass of wine, and let's make this sauce.

Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a stock pot over medium heat. Put the short ribs in the pan, but don't crowd the pot. If you have 12 ribs, and 12 barely fit - do two sets of six. You want to give these ribs a good sear to lock the juices in. You don't want to cook them through. If the pot's crowded, the meat's going to get grey, but won't sear. So take your time and sear these ribs. Transfer ribs to a plate with a paper towel on it to absorb the extra grease. Drain them well and put them aside.

Place the sausages in the same pan and brown them on all sides. Again, you just want to give these things color, so don't cook them through. Place them on the plate with the ribs.

Drain the grease/oil from the pot and add the whole cloves of garlic. Cook for a few minutes to give the garlic color, but don't burn it. Add the tomato paste and stir well. Give it about a minute or two until the paste is bubbling. Now, add the wine, and have a slug yourself. It's starting to smell good in here, isn't it? Hell yes it is. I can feel the love already - wish I was there. Stir it well, and let it go for about a minute.

Dump the cans of tomatoes in the pot - everything (seeds, liquid, everything). I like to squash the whole tomatoes with my hand to give it a chunky texture, but you can use chopped tomatoes or chop them yourself if you want. It's your sauce - go nuts. Now add the water and give it a good stir. Shred those leaves of basil with your hand. No fancy cutting with the knife, just cut them by hand as small as you can and toss them in.

Season with salt and pepper. Cover and bring to a high simmer. Taste it and adjust the seasoning, then toss the ribs and sausages in the sauce. Turn the heat down to low, low, low. Cover it. Stir it

every 10 minutes to make sure it's not burning. We want it to simmer for 1 hour 45 minutes, then we'll add our meatballs and cook for another 30 minutes.

Now, let's make those meatballs. More wine!

See those ingredients for the meatballs? Throw them all in a big bowl. When everything's in there, wash your hands, then mix it all up with your fingers. Get dirty. Mix it up. When it's all mixed together, wash your hands again. They're filthy now, but I'll bet they smell great.

Get your hands wet. Spoon a tablespoon of the meatball mixture into the palm of your hand, and in a spinning motion, roll the meatballs in between your palms until smooth. 5 seconds of palm spinning should do the trick. You want the meatballs about 1 to 2 inches wide.

When the meatballs are all rolled up, heat 2 tablespoons of oil in your skillet over medium heat. Brown the meatballs on all sides - 5 minutes a side should do it. Again, don't crowd the pan. We want a good sear, but we don't want to burn them either.

When each batch of meatballs are finished, put them on a plate with a paper towel on them to drain the grease off of them.

Now, put the meatballs in the pot of sauce and all them to simmer over low heat for another 30 minutes.

Boil the pasta, and call the kids in for dinner.

Cook the pasta to al dente (almost finished, but still a little hard). Drain it.

Carefully remove the ribs, sausages, and meatballs from the sauce and put them on a platter. When all of the meat has been removed, toss the pasta into the pot of sauce. Cover and cook a few more minutes until it's done.

Serve the pasta first, remembering not to over-sauce it. Toss some freshly grated parmesan over the top if you like. Serve with some fresh crusty bread, and dip it in the sauce. Enjoy the pasta. Then, serve the meat as a second course.

Leftovers? No problem.

Those meatballs are beautiful in a fresh bun, covered in some sauce, then topped with a slice of provolone or shredded mozzarella. Heat it in the oven to melt the cheese, and you're good to go.

Enjoy!

Phil