

MEATBALLS IN TOMATO SAUCE

For quite a few years after university I went through a phase – let’s call it ‘the dark ages’ – during which I did not eat meatballs. That was until my friend Martin, a big man with a big appetite, showed me one evening how great decent meatballs can taste. And so I set about developing a meatballs recipe for the braai – glory days! Your weapon of choice here is a cast-iron pan called a ‘skillet’, but any other flat-bottomed cast-iron pot or fireproof pan will also do the trick. The recipe works equally well with lean beef mince or ostrich mince.

WHAT YOU NEED

(serves 4, or 1 Martin)

For the meatballs:

500 g lean mince (beef or ostrich)

1 cup white bread crumbs (buy at the supermarket or make your own by processing 2 slices of bread in a food processor)

1 small bunch spring onions or chives (finely sliced)

1 tot fresh basil (finely chopped)

1 tot fresh parsley (finely chopped)

1 tsp salt

½ tsp black pepper

½ tsp dried oregano

1 egg

olive oil (for frying)

For the tomato sauce:

4 cloves garlic (crushed or chopped)

2 tots red wine

2 tins tomatoes (whole, chopped or cherry)

2 tots tomato paste
2 tsp sugar
1 tsp paprika
1 tsp salt
½ tsp black pepper

To serve:

extra chopped basil or parsley
Parmesan cheese (grated or shaved)
500 g pasta

WHAT TO DO

1. Mix together all the ingredients for the meatballs (except the olive oil) in a large bowl with your recently washed hands. Now roll balls into roughly the size of golf balls. Your aim is to have 12 meatballs. If you have one handy, use an ice-cream scoop to create meatball portions of the same size before rolling them.
2. Heat your pot or pan over medium-hot coals. Add olive oil and then fry the meatballs all at once. You need a pot or pan where all the meatballs fit into the bottom of the pot or pan in a single layer. Use tongs or a spatula to gently turn them once or twice, taking care not to break them.
3. When the meatballs are browned (but not cooked through), start making the tomato sauce by scattering the garlic into the pan with the meatballs and frying for another minute.
4. Add the wine and shake the pan lightly to loosen any brown bits on the bottom. Use a spatula to scrape off the stubborn bits that remain stuck.
5. When the wine is almost completely reduced, add the tomatoes, tomato paste, sugar, paprika, salt and pepper. Bring to the boil and then simmer uncovered over medium to low heat for about 15–20 minutes until the meatballs are cooked.
6. Take off the fire and then top with extra chopped basil and/or parsley as well as some grated or shaved Parmesan cheese. Serve immediately on a bed of pasta.

AND ...

You can prepare the meatballs hours in advance. Cover them and store in a fridge, then you can continue from step 2 when your guests arrive.