

Not-sagna Pasta Toss

Easier than lasagna, because it's not, this pasta, meat sauce and ricotta toss-up is just as hearty and comforting as the layered Italian fave, but it's ready in a fraction of the time and with much less effort.

1 pound curly short cut pasta (recommended: campanelle by Barilla, fusilli or cavatappi)

Coarse salt

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, 2 turns of the pan

1 pound ground chicken (or Turkey)

4 cloves garlic, chopped

1 medium onion, finely chopped

1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes, eyeball it in your palm

Black pepper

1/2 teaspoon allspice, eyeball it in your palm

1 teaspoon, several drops, Worcestershire sauce

1/2 cup dry red wine, a couple of glugs

1/2 cup chicken stock

1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes

1 1/2 cups part-skim ricotta cheese

1 cup fresh basil, about 20 leaves

1/2 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, a couple of handfuls, plus some to pass at table

Heat a large pot of water to boil for pasta. Salt water and cook pasta to al dente. Heads up: you will need a ladle of the starchy cooking water to help form sauce before draining.

Heat a deep nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add extra-virgin olive oil, 2 turns of the pan. Add the meat and break it up into small bits as it caramelizes. Once meat has good color to it, 4 to 5 minutes, add garlic, onions and red pepper flakes and season with salt, pepper, allspice and Worcestershire sauce. Cook another 5 minutes, deglaze the meat and onions with red wine, cook off a minute, then combine about 1/2 cup of stock into the meat. Stir in the tomatoes and bring to a bubble. Reduce heat to medium low and simmer 5 minutes.

Place ricotta cheese in the bottom of a shallow bowl. Add a ladleful of boiling, starchy pasta water to the ricotta and stir to combine.

Add a couple of handfuls of grated Parmesan to the ricotta and mix it in.

Drain pasta. Toss hot pasta with cheeses. Add half the thick meat sauce to the pasta bowl and combine. Tear or shred the basil and add to the meat and pasta, toss again. Taste to adjust salt and pepper. Serve bowlfuls of Not-sagna with extra sauce on top and more grated Parmesan to pass at the table.