Italian Meatballs in Tomato Sauce

Old-Fashioned Polpette al Sugo | Mangia with Nonna

Recipe Details

- Preparation Time: 30 minutes
- Cooking Time: 45–50 minutes
- Total Time: approximately 1 hour 15–20 minutes
- Servings: 20–24 medium meatballs (about 6–8 portions)

Ingredients

For the Meatballs

- 1 lb (454 g) ground beef, approximately 80% lean
- 1 lb (454 g) ground pork
- 1 cup (about 100 g) plain breadcrumbs
- 1/2 cup (120 ml) whole milk
- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 cup (about 50 g) finely grated Parmigiano Reggiano
- 1/4 cup finely chopped fresh parsley
- 2 garlic cloves, finely minced
- 1 tsp fine salt, plus extra to taste
- 1/2 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp (30 ml) extra-virgin olive oil for browning

For the Tomato Sauce

- 1 can (28 oz / 794 g) crushed tomatoes
- 1/2 small onion, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tbsp (30 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup fresh basil leaves
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- Up to 1/2 cup (120 ml) water, as needed

Instructions

1. Soak the breadcrumbs

Combine breadcrumbs and milk in a bowl. Rest for 5 minutes until moistened.

2. Prepare the mixture

Add beef, pork, eggs, Parmigiano Reggiano, parsley, garlic, salt and pepper. Mix gently just until combined; avoid compacting.

3. Shape

With lightly damp hands, form 20–24 meatballs about 1½ inches (4 cm) wide. Place on a clean tray.

4. Brown

Heat 2 tbsp olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Brown meatballs in batches, turning gently, about 6–8 minutes total. They do not have to be fully cooked yet.

5. Make the sauce

In a wide pot, warm 2 tbsp olive oil. Cook onion 3–4 minutes, add garlic for 30 seconds, then crushed tomatoes and basil. Add a little water if necessary. Season lightly and simmer 5 minutes.

6. Finish in sauce

Transfer meatballs to the sauce. Cover loosely and simmer gently for about 30–35 minutes, turning carefully once or twice, until cooked through. Verify the centers reach 160°F (71°C) with a food thermometer.

7. Serve

Taste the sauce and adjust seasoning. Serve warm with crusty bread and additional Parmigiano Reggiano if desired.

Notes and Storage

- Do not overmix: gently combined meat stays more tender.
- For a softer texture, keep the breadcrumbs fully moistened and simmer gently rather than boiling vigorously.
- Refrigerate cooked meatballs and sauce promptly in shallow containers; use within 3–4 days.
- Freeze in airtight portions for 2–3 months for best quality. Reheat leftovers to 165°F (74°C).