



Slow Cooker Baked Ziti

Description

Let's talk about the ultimate comfort food for busy people: Slow Cooker Baked Ziti. I've always loved a good, hearty pasta dish, but after a long day at work, the last thing I want is to spend hours in the kitchen. This recipe has become one of my go-tos because I can set it and forget it! Did you know that baked ziti is actually a close cousin to lasagna, originating from Italian-American cuisine? Well, now you can enjoy all those wonderful flavors with minimal effort.

This slow cooker baked ziti pairs perfectly with a simple green salad drizzled with a light vinaigrette. I also love serving it with some crusty garlic bread on the side to soak up all that delicious sauce. If you're in the mood for something bubbly, a glass of red wine like a nice Chianti or a crisp sparkling water with a slice of lemon are great choices.

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Ingredients

- 1 pound ground beef or Italian sausage
- 1 jar (24 ounces) of your favorite marinara sauce
- 1 can (15 ounces) of crushed tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- 1 pound ziti pasta
- 1 cup ricotta cheese
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Fresh basil for garnish (optional)

Directions

1. In a skillet over medium heat, brown the ground beef or Italian sausage until fully cooked. Drain the excess fat.
2. In the slow cooker, combine the cooked meat, marinara sauce, crushed tomatoes, Italian seasoning, salt, and pepper.
3. Stir in the uncooked ziti pasta, ensuring the pasta is well-coated with the sauce.
4. Drop spoonfuls of ricotta cheese across the top of the pasta mixture.
5. Cover and cook on LOW for 3-4 hours or until the pasta is tender.

6. During the last 20 minutes of cooking, sprinkle the mozzarella and Parmesan cheeses over the top.
7. Serve hot, garnished with fresh basil if desired.

Variations & Tips

If you're looking for a lighter version, you can use ground turkey or chicken instead of beef. For a vegetarian option, simply omit the meat altogether and add a variety of vegetables like bell peppers, spinach, or mushrooms. Gluten-free pasta works well for those with gluten sensitivities—just keep an eye on the cooking time, as it might cook faster. For an extra kick, you can also add some red pepper flakes or use a spicy marinara sauce.

Category

1. Crockpot Recipes

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