

PASTA FAGIOLI AL FORNO (Baked Pasta Fagiol)

Serves 8.

By Dennis W. Viau; modified from a *Taste of Home* recipe.

Pasta Fagioli (aka pasta e fagioli) is probably best known as an Italian pasta and bean soup. I've been making it every winter for years. This baked version (not a soup) intrigued me; so I thought it was worth a try.



Ingredients:

2½ cups uncooked elbow macaroni (about 12 ounces/340g) or other small pasta
1 can (28 ounces/794g) whole plum tomatoes
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, chopped
1 pound (454g) bulk Italian sausage (or 3 links, casing removed)
1 medium carrot, chopped
1 celery stalk, chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 teaspoon dried oregano
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon dried basil
¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (optional)
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 can (15 ounces/425g) cannellini beans, drained and rinsed (for dry cannellini beans, see below)*
½ cup (40g) shredded Parmesan cheese, more for garnish
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley

Directions:

Heat oven to 350° (177°C). Cook pasta according to package directions until *al dente* tender; drain.

While the pasta is cooking, drain the tomatoes, reserving the juices. Coarsely chop the tomatoes. Heat the oil in a 6-quart (6 liter) pot over medium-high heat and sauté the onion until lightly caramelized. Add the sausage meat and break it up with a spatula. Add the carrot, celery and garlic. Cook until the meat is no longer pink, 6-8 minutes; drain any excess fat.

Stir in the tomato paste, seasonings, chopped tomatoes and reserved juices. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer, uncovered, 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from the heat.

Add the beans and the Parmesan cheese and parsley. Add the cooked pasta and stir to distribute. Transfer to a greased 13x9-inch (33x23cm) baking dish. Cover with foil.

Bake 20 minutes. Uncover and garnish with additional Parmesan cheese. Bake until the cheese is melted, 10-15 minutes. Serve hot.

*If using dry cannellini beans: Sort for unwanted debris and then rinse the beans. Soak the beans in 3 cups (700ml) salted (1 tablespoon) water, 7 hours or overnight. Drain and rinse. Place in a lidded pot with about 3 cups (700ml) of unsalted water. Heat until the water just starts to boil. Cover the pot, reduce the heat to low and simmer gently for 2 hours or until tender. Seven ounces (200g) dry beans yields about 15 ounces (425g) cooked beans. Dry beans can also be cooked in a pressure cooker. See your pot's instructions.