Ziti al forno

OVEN-BAKED ZITI

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Serves 6
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Ziti pairs perfectly with a meaty ragu or a simple sugo (sauce) such as tomato or olive oil and chilli. The shorter length is commonly used in pasta al forno (baked pasta), which is how I prefer to prepare it.

Sicilian cheeses such as Pecorino Siciliano, provola or caciocavallo are perfect to use in a Sicilian ziti al forno, but mozzarella works too. I like to finish with some pecorino or even a cheesy pangrattato for an added crunch.

80 ml (⅓ cup) extra virgin olive oil, or as needed
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
750 g (1 lb 11 oz) passata (pureed tomatoes)
handful of basil leaves, plus extra to serve
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) dried short ziti
200 g (7 oz) provola cheese, shredded or diced
50 g (1¾ oz) pecorino, grated
50 g (1¾ oz) coarse dried breadcrumbs

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F).

Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan over medium heat. Add the garlic and saute until softened. Add the passata and basil, season with salt and pepper and simmer for 15 minutes. Taste and adjust seasoning if needed, then simmer for a further 5 minutes.

Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil over high heat, then add cooking salt. Add the ziti and cook for 2 minutes less than the packet instructions.

Use a handled colander to transfer the cooked pasta directly into the sauce. Add 200 ml (7 fl oz) of the starchy pasta water to the sauce (this will help the pasta to finish cooking in the oven) and stir to coat well.

Coat the base of a large oven dish with some of the sauce.

Start the layering process: add some of the ziti to cover the base, then scatter over some provola. Create two or three layers, finishing with the ziti on top.

In a bowl, combine the grated pecorino and breadcrumbs and sprinkle this mixture over the top layer of pasta.

Bake for 15 minutes, or until the sauce is bubbling and the topping is golden. Top with basil leaves and serve.



ZITI

A southern Italian classic, also enjoyed in nearby regions such as Campania, ziti is a tube-shaped pasta. It can be either short or long, lisce (smooth) or rigate (ridged). The name comes from the Italian word 'zita', meaning 'bride'. Traditionally served at weddings, ziti symbolises wealth and prosperity for the newlyweds.

A Pasta TOUR

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