

Creamy Noodle & Ham Bake

Ingredients:

4 cups medium size shell pasta
4 tablespoons butter, divided in two
1 medium yellow onion, diced fine
3-5 cloves garlic, minced
4-8 ounces mushrooms, chopped
8 ounces spinach, washed and chopped
¼ cup all-purpose flour
2 cups milk
½ teaspoon basil
½ teaspoon thyme
½ teaspoon salt + more to taste if desired
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
1 cup ricotta or small-curd cottage cheese (see note)
2 - 2 ½ cups diced ham
Parmesan ¼ - ½ cup (for sprinkling over top), fresh grated

Directions:

Note: If you'd prefer to use cottage cheese, buy the small curd and mash it with a fork until the texture is fine. I prefer it over ricotta since it's more affordable.

Bring a large pot of water to boil - and cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and set aside.

While pasta is cooking add 2 tablespoons of butter to a large sauce pan and saute onion, garlic and mushrooms over medium heat until soft, stirring frequently, about 5-7 minutes. Add the spinach at the end until wilted - 1 minute. Remove from pan and place in a bowl.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees and grease a 9x13 size casserole.

In the same sauce pan you cooked the vegetables, melt 2 tablespoons of butter over medium heat. Add the flour and stir until combined. Immediately add the milk and whisk together until smooth. Stir in basil, thyme, salt and black pepper. Bring to a soft simmer and cook for 2-3 minutes until thickened. Remove from heat and stir in the ricotta/cottage cheese, ham, and the vegetables. Then stir in the pasta.

Pour pasta mixture into the casserole dish, and top with fresh grated Parmesan cheese - as much as you like (about ¼ - ½ cup is about right). Bake for 20-25 minutes or until bubbly.

Recipe Source:

Adapted from Taste and Tell's [Creamy Shells and Ham Casserole](#)