

Vegetable Lasagna with Butternut Béchamel

9 whole wheat lasagna noodles

2 to 2 1/2 pound butternut squash (or 2 pounds chopped squash)

Olive oil

Salt and pepper to taste, about 1 t salt and 1/2 t pepper

1 large bunch (about 5 large leaves) chard, well-washed or 15 oz frozen spinach

1 pound cremini mushrooms, sliced

1/2 onion, diced

1/4 cup water or white wine

1 cup milk, plus additional if needed

2-4 T half and half or heavy cream

1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

1 lemon, zested or 2 T fresh lemon juice (much less if concentrate)

1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme leaves or 1/2 t dried thyme

1 1/2 cup shredded Parmesan and mozzarella cheese mix or 1 c mozzarella and 1/2 c Parmesan

Heat the oven to 375°F. Lightly grease a 9x13-inch baking dish with olive oil. Bring a large pot of salted water to boil over high heat. Add the lasagna noodles and cook as directed on the package. When cooked, drain and lay out on clean kitchen towels to dry.

While the pasta is cooking, peel and seed the squash. Cut into 1-inch cubes and toss with 1 tablespoon olive oil and a generous amount of salt and pepper. Spread on a baking sheet and roast for 40 minutes or until extremely soft.

If chard: Remove the stems and ribs from the chard leaves by folding each leaf in half lengthwise and using the tip of a chef's knife to slit away the main rib. Chop each rib and stem into 1/2-inch pieces. Roll each leaf up into a cigar shape, cut it in half lengthwise, and then crossways into thin ribbons.

If frozen spinach: thaw and squeeze dry

Heat olive oil in pan. Add the mushrooms and onion. Cook until onions are translucent. Add the chard/spinach and 1/4 cup water or white wine and cook until the leaves are tender and wilted. Turn off the heat and season the vegetables lightly with salt and pepper.

Once squash is roasted let cool slightly. Put into a bowl and add 1/2 cup milk, half and half, nutmeg, lemon zest or juice, and thyme. Use an immersion blender to puree the mixture, adding the remaining milk as you go. Add extra milk if necessary to make the sauce smooth and creamy, but not too thin. (Think thin fruit smoothie.) Add salt and pepper to taste.

To assemble the lasagna, spoon about 1/4 of the butternut sauce into the bottom of the prepared baking pan and spread to thinly coat the bottom. Place 1/4 of the noodles on top (3 noodles) and then spread 1/3 of remaining sauce on noodles. Top with 1/2 of the cooked vegetables, and 1/2 cup of cheese. Add another layer of noodles, then sauce, then the rest of the vegetables, and 1/2 cup of cheese. Place the final layer of noodles over the vegetables and spread the last 1/3 of the sauce over top. Sprinkle evenly with the remaining 1/2 cup of cheese.

Cover the lasagna with foil and bake at 350°F for 45 minutes. Remove from the oven and let stand uncovered for 5 to 10 minutes before slicing.