

Bakes Ziti

Serves 8 to 10

We prefer baked ziti made with heavy cream, but whole milk can be substituted by increasing the amount of cornstarch to 2 teaspoons and increasing the cooking time in step 3 by 1 to 2 minutes. Our preferred brand of mozzarella is Sorrento Galbani Whole Milk Mozzarella. Part-skim mozzarella can also be used.

1 pound whole-milk or 1% cottage cheese
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
3 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (about 1 1/2 cups)
Table salt
1 pound ziti or other short tubular pasta
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
5 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 5 teaspoons)
1 (28 ounce) can tomato sauce
1 (14.5 ounce) can diced tomatoes
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil leaves
1 teaspoon sugar
Ground black pepper
3/4 teaspoon cornstarch
1 cup heavy cream
8 ounces whole milk mozzarella cheese, cut into 1/4 inch pieces (about 1 1/2 cups)

1. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 350 degrees. Whisk the cottage cheese, eggs, and 1 cup of the Parmesan together in a medium bowl; set aside. Bring 4 quarts water to a boil in a large pot. Add 1 tablespoon salt and the pasta; cook, stirring occasionally, until the pasta begin to soften but is not yet cooked through, 5 to 7 minutes. Drain the pasta and leave in the colander (do not wash the pot).
2. Meanwhile, heat the oil and garlic in a 12-inch skillet over medium heat, until the garlic is fragrant but not brown, about 2 minutes. Stir in the tomato sauce, diced tomatoes, and oregano; simmer until thickened, about 10 minutes. Off the heat, stir in 1/2 cup of the basil and the sugar; season with salt and pepper to taste.
3. Stir the cornstarch and heavy cream together in a small bowl; transfer the mixture to the now empty pasta pot set over medium heat. Bring to a simmer and cook until thickened, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat and add the cottage cheese mixture, 1 cup of the tomato sauce, and 3/4 cup of the mozzarella; stir to combine. Add the pasta and stir to coat thoroughly with the sauce.
4. Transfer the pasta to a 13 by 9-inch baking dish and spread the remaining tomato sauce evenly over the pasta. Sprinkle the remaining 3/4 cup mozzarella and remaining 1/2 cup parmesan over the top. Cover the baking dish tightly with foil and bake for 30 minutes.

5. Remove the foil and continue to cook until the cheese is bubbling and beginning to brown, about 30 minutes longer. Cool for 20 minutes. Sprinkle with the remaining 2 tablespoons basil and serve.