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BEST Vegetarian Baked Ziti

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This recipe is all you need to make an all-star vegetarian baked ziti with ricotta, marinara sauce, and a layer of bright veggies! This is the pasta casserole you can make any night of the week, or prepare ahead and store for later. Add a side salad and call it dinner! For a more Mediterranean diet-friendly option, use whole wheat or whole grain pasta.

Be sure to check out my tips and step-by-step tutorial for how to make this baked ziti and what to serve along!





Love lasagna but don't like the work? I'm with ya! (I mean, I'm the one who threw lasagna noodles into a pot of soup. Still yummy, by the way.)

But if you're after that great combination of pasta, tomato sauce, and bubbly cheese, in a baked pasta casserole, this easy baked ziti is your ticket!

I think of baked ziti like lasagna's chill cousin. Not as fussy (no wrestling pasta sheets involved), but still tasty. There is a little bit of layering involved, because we are still talking pasta casserole, but it's quite easy to throw together any night of the week.

Almost everyone who makes baked ziti have their own version of it. Some vary the cheeses—are you into ricotta or cottage cheese? Some use loads of ground beef or

sausage. And some go for a meatless version.

Now, I have nothing against a meaty pasta casserole—have you tried my Greek Pastitsio? It's one I make for special occasions.

But for a quick weeknight dinner, I wanted to change things up and make a bit of a lightened up baked ziti with a bunch of beautiful veggies nestled in the middle. And everyone LOVED it!





What I love about this Vegetarian Baked Ziti

This baked ziti is such a draw for a busy home cook like me. Here are a few reasons I love it:

- **Easy baked ziti you can make ahead!** This vegetarian baked ziti is a crowd pleaser that you can throw together any night of the week or make it ahead as part of your meal prep (it will keep well in the fridge for 3 nights or so.)
- **The perfect way to sneak in some colorful vegetables.** This is a baked ziti with ricotta for a filling, but I love sneaking in some small diced vegetables as a layer in

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- **Lightened Ricotta Filling.** I use a combination of part-skim ricotta (still as tasty and creamy) with a bit of Parmesan and melty Mozzarella.
- **For an easy dinner, just add a side salad!** If you're looking to use this baked ziti as a vegetarian main, just add a bright [salad](#) or some [crispy brussels sprouts](#) next to it. But if you want to use it as a side, you can always make this quick [lemon chicken](#) or [yogurt-marinated skillet chicken](#) to go along.

Ziti or Penne? Which To Use in this Recipe

Ziti is shaped in straight-cut tubes of pasta, smooth in texture. It's super popular in Naples and gets its fun name from the word "zita," meaning bride (in Naples, it's served as the zita's/brides pasta.)

Penne is shaped in tubes of pasta cut on the diagonal. I like using penne-rigate is textured on the outside, which allows it to grab even more of the pasta sauce.

Either ziti or penne will work well in this pasta casserole recipe. I don't often find ziti at my local grocery store, so what I use here is penne pasta.

How to Make Baked Ziti with Vegetables Step-by-Step

1. Cook pasta to al dante according to package. Important tip here, do not overcook the pasta. Cook it for the shortest time offered on the package; it should have some bite to it. And remember, it will cook some more in the oven.

Once the pasta is cooked, drain but keep a bit of the pasta water to use later (about 1/2 cup or so will do)

2. Cook the vegetables. Grab a large skillet and heat a bit of extra virgin olive oil. Begin by cooking the onions, then add in the rest of the veggies and garlic. Season with kosher salt, oregano, and a bit of paprika. (about 8 minutes or so till veggies are nice and tender.)

3. Mix in the Ricotta filling (ricotta, a bit of Parmesan, and a sprinkle of mozzarella).

Tip: a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil really helps mix things up.

4. Coat the cooked pasta with some of the marinara sauce and the ricotta mixture. I used store-bought marinara sauce here.

4. Assemble the pasta casserole. First, a little marinara sauce on the bottom of the dish, then half the pasta, then cooked vegetables and a bit of basil. A sprinkle of mozzarella, then...

4. b) Continue by layering the remaining pasta, remaining marinara sauce. Finish with mozzarella and Parmesan cheese for the very top layer.

5. Bake in 375 degrees F heated-oven until top layer begins to bubble and gain some beautiful color (about 30 minutes or so) Remove from the oven and let sit for 10 to 15 minutes before cutting into squares.

Make Ahead Baked Ziti with Ricotta

If you're having guests and would like to prepare this vegetarian baked ziti one night ahead, you absolutely can!

To do so, cook the pasta and veggies. Prepare the ricotta mixture. Assemble everything in a casserole dish according to the recipe but DO NOT bake. Bring the casserole to room temperature, then cover tightly and refrigerate overnight.

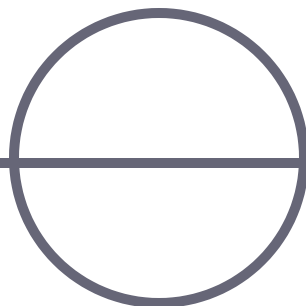
This is probably also great to assemble and freeze until you need to bake it. Let me know if you give that a try!

Cooked leftovers may last 2 to 3 days, if properly stored in the fridge or frozen for later use.

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best vegetarian baked ziti



4.9 from 40 reviews

Author: Suzy Karadsheh *Total Time:* 55 minutes

Yield: 12 pieces

PIN RECIPE

This recipe is all you need to make an all-star vegetarian baked ziti with ricotta, marinara sauce, and a layer of bright veggies. Perfect weeknight baked pasta, and you can prepare it ahead and store in the fridge or freezer for later. See notes.

INGREDIENTS

SCALE

3/4 lb Ziti or Penne pasta

Extra virgin olive oil (I used Early Harvest Greek extra virgin olive oil)

1 medium red onion, chopped

2 zucchini, small diced

1 bell pepper (orange or red), cored and diced

2 garlic cloves, minced

Kosher salt

1 tsp dry oregano

1/2 tsp sweet paprika

6 cups quality Marinara sauce (store-bought is fine)

10 basil leaves, torn or carefully sliced/chopped

Ricotta Filling

1 cup ricotta (I used part-skim)

1/2 cup grated Parmesan, divided

6 oz shredded Mozzarella

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INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Heat oven to 375 degrees F.
- 2 **Cook the pasta.** Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. When ready, add the pasta and cook to al dente according to package. When ready, drain pasta but save about 1/2 cup cooking water.
- 3 **Cook the vegetables.** While the pasta is cooking , cook the vegetables. In a large skillet, heat 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil over medium heat until shimmering but not smoking. Add onions and cook for 3 minutes or so,

tossing regularly, then add diced zucchini, bell pepper, and garlic. Raise heat to medium-high and cook for about 6 to 8 minutes, tossing regularly, until vegetables have softened and cooked through. Season with kosher salt, oregano and paprika. Sit aside till needed.

- 4 **Prepare the Ricotta Filling.** In a mixing bowl, combine the ricotta, 1/4 cup grated Parmesan and 3 tbsp Mozzarella. Mix well. (If needed, add a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil to help mix the cheese)
- 5 **Combine Pasta with Sauce and Cheese Filling.** Once the pasta has been cooked and drained, bring it back to the cooking pot. Add 1/2 of the marinara sauce and starchy cooking water you reserved (1/2 cup). Mix well to coat the pasta with the sauce. Fold in the ricotta cheese filling. Mix again to combine, but leave some big "pockets" of the cheese mixture.
- 6 **Assemble the Pasta Casserole.** Grab a 9 1/2" x 13" casserole dish. Pour a little marinara sauce to the bottom of the dish, spread. Spread half the pasta. Now add the cooked vegetables and some of the torn basil on top and spread well across the pasta layer. Sprinkle a little bit of shredded mozzarella on top (leave more mozzarella for very top layer.) Add remaining pasta. Spread remaining marinara sauce on top and add remaining mozzarella cheese and Parmesan cheese.
- 7 **Bake.** Place the casserole dish on the middle rack of your heated oven. Bake uncovered for 30 minutes or so. Remove from heat and let rest about 10 to 15 minutes before cutting through. garnish with fresh basil.

NOTES

- i **Make Ahead Tips:** If you're having guests and would like to prepare this vegetarian baked ziti one night ahead, you absolutely can! To do so, cook the pasta and veggies. Prepare the ricotta mixture. Assemble everything in a casserole dish according to the recipe but DO NOT bake. Cover and refrigerate. When ready, bake according to step #7 (you may allow a little more baking time if you are baking from cold.)

- i **Make Ahead and Freeze:** You may also assemble and freeze until you need to bake it. Instead of refrigerating, cover tightly and freeze (assuming your casserole dish is freezer safe.) When ready, cover ziti dish with foil and bake in 350 degrees heated oven to thaw completely and warm through for about 45 minutes to 1 hour. Then, remove the foil and bake for 10 to 15 minutes till top is bubbling and gaining some color.
- i **Leftovers:** Cooked leftovers may last 2 to 3 days, if properly stored in the fridge or frozen for later use.
- i **Visit our online shop** to browse our selection of olive oils and all-natural and organic spices.



Prep Time: 15 mins



Cook Time: 40 mins



Category: Entree



Method: Baked

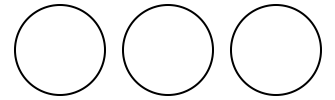


Cuisine: Italian

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I'm Suzy; born and bred right on the shores of the Mediterranean. I'm all about easy, healthy recipes with big Mediterranean flavors. Three values guide my cooking: eat with the seasons; use whole foods; and above all, share! So happy you're here...

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Comments

Erika King

MAY 22, 2024 AT 8:14 PM

Loved this dinner! Always happy to find a new vegetarian win. Thanks!

Reply

Kristin

NOVEMBER 12, 2023 AT 3:30 PM

You've got confusing directions above. The proportions in your ricotta filling in the ingredients list are different than the directions under "Prepare the ricotta filling." Subsequently I mixed the ingredients listed above the directions as noted in the filling ingredients. You may want to clarify that the cheese ingredients are not entirely in the ricotta filling itself.

Reply

TMD Team

NOVEMBER 13, 2023 AT 3:51 PM

Thanks for the feedback, Kristin. We'll take another look.

Reply

Svetlana E Tevelrakh

OCTOBER 4, 2023 AT 7:40 PM

Treat



Reply

Christine

SEPTEMBER 9, 2023 AT 11:37 PM

Delicious!!!! Thank you for a reliable potluck dish



[Reply](#)

Desiree

JUNE 25, 2023 AT 7:02 PM

Great base recipe! I customized by adding cayenne to my ricotta, leaving out the peppers, adding spinach, fresh tomato and some veggie beef crumbles. Also subbed a lot of the ingredients for frozen or dried instead of fresh to make this more budget friendly. Meal prepping saves me during the week, and this was a good recipe. This is a good fridge cleaner if you have a bunch of veggies about to go bad. Or if you're like me, just grab what you have in the freezer.



[Reply](#)

TMD Team

JUNE 26, 2023 AT 11:12 AM

Thanks, Desiree!

[Reply](#)

Stephanie

SEPTEMBER 16, 2022 AT 4:54 PM

... also diced eggplant

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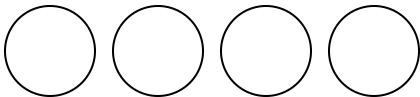
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