

# Cheesy Stuffed Shells

Prep: 20 mins

Cook: 60 mins

Total: 80 mins

Servings: 6

Yield: 24 shells

In just 20 minutes, you can have these creamy stuffed shells ready to bake, and trust me, you'll be wondering why you didn't make them sooner. If, like me, you're someone who adores cheesy lasagna but craves extra ricotta goodness in every mouthful, then this dish is an absolute dream come true. It's incredibly comforting and lip smackingly good—my family always goes back for seconds!

You can get ahead of schedule by partially preparing this recipe in advance. Simply stuff the pasta shells and place them in the baking dish the day before and keep them in the fridge. On the day of baking, pull it out an hour prior to let it warm up to room temperature and bake as directed (or just bake it a little longer, until the shells are heated through).

What really sets shells apart from other pastas is their soft, chewy texture and their attractive sea shell shape. It's important not to overcook them; they should be al dente, as they'll continue to cook slightly in the oven. The pasta shells absorb the marinara sauce while baking so each bite bursts with flavour.

The addition of Italian seasoning, zesty lemon, and a trio of mozzarella, parmesan, and ricotta perfectly complements the savoury sauce. Since stuffed shells are a hearty dish, I balance them out with light sides. Pair it with a refreshing crisp salad like this colourful citrus salad, oven-roasted vegetables, or some fragrant garlic bread for a well-rounded meal. Together, this turns a simple meal into a saucy feast.

## Recipe Tips

- Drain the ricotta—Avoid loose and watery ricotta filling by either draining your ricotta overnight or sandwiching it between a few layers of paper towels for 5 minutes to absorb excess water.
- Why you need eggs—Eggs pull double duty in ricotta filling: they bind the filling ingredients together and impart richness and moisture.
- Cook more shells than you need—You can cook a few extra shells in case of any tears.
- Skip the pre-shredded cheese—Shred your cheese. Pre-shredded cheese is coated with additives such as cornstarch that prevent clumping and prevent it from melting well.
- Balance out the sauce—If your tomato sauce is very sweet, add some fish sauce, grated garlic, or anchovy paste for instant umami.
- Fill ‘em fast—Speed up the assembly process by adding filling to a ziplock bag, cutting a corner off the bag, and pipe the filling into the shells.

## Make Ahead

Prepare the recipe as directed through Step 7. Press plastic wrap directly on the surface of stuffed shells. Refrigerate for up to 1 day. Let come to room temperature 1 hour. Remove plastic wrap and cover tightly with foil. Bake as directed.

## Ingredients

- 26 uncooked jumbo pasta shells (8 ounces)
- 1 (15-ounce) container whole milk-ricotta cheese
- 1 large egg
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest (from 1 lemon)
- 3/4 teaspoon fine salt
- 1/2 teaspoon dried italian seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes, plus more to taste
- 1 3/4 cups (7 ounces) low-moisture part-skim mozzarella cheese, shredded and divided
- 3/4 cup (3 ounces) pre-grated parmesan cheese, divided
- 1 (24-ounce) jar marinara sauce

## Steps to Make It

1. Gather the ingredients. Preheat the oven to 375 F with a rack about 10 inches from the heat source.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil over high. Add 26 uncooked jumbo pasta shells (8 ounces) and cook according to package instructions. Drain in a colander and rinse under cold running water to stop the cooking.
3. Arrange the cooked and drained pasta shells in a single layer on a baking sheet.
4. While the pasta cooks, stir together 1 (15-ounce) container whole-milk ricotta cheese, 1 large egg, 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest (from 1 lemon), 3/4 teaspoon fine salt, 1/2 teaspoon dried Italian seasoning, 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes, 1 1/2 cups (6 ounces) of the mozzarella, and 1/2 cup (2 ounces) of the parmesan in a medium bowl until thoroughly combined.
5. Spread 2 1/2 cups of the marinara sauce in the bottom of a 13- by 9-inch baking dish.
6. Spoon about 1 1/2 tablespoons of the ricotta mixture into each pasta shell, then nestle them, filled side up, in the sauce in the baking dish.
7. Spoon the remaining 1/2 cup marinara sauce over the shells and sprinkle with the remaining 1/4 cup (1 ounce) mozzarella and the remaining 1/4 cup (1 ounce) parmesan cheese.
8. Cover the stuffed shells with a large sheet of aluminum foil and bake until the sauce is bubbling, about 40 minutes.
9. Remove the baking dish from the oven and remove the foil. Increase the oven temperature to broil and allow it to preheat 5 for minutes. Return the stuffed shells to the oven rack and broil until the cheese is lightly browned in spots, 3 to 5 minutes. Let stand for 10 minutes before serving.

## How to Store

Refrigerate leftovers in an airtight container for up to 5 days. Reheat, covered, in a 350 F oven until heated through.

To freeze, prepare the recipe as directed through Step 7. Cover with plastic wrap, then aluminium foil. Freeze for up to 1 month. Remove from freezer and thaw in refrigerator overnight. Let come to room temperature 1 hour. Remove plastic wrap and cover tightly with foil. Bake as directed.