

An Ever-Improvisational Meat Loaf

By Sally Schneider

My meat loaf has evolved over the years as I've given rein to my personal idiosyncrasies – preferring other meats to the usual beef, for example and guided by what I had in my pantry. Recently I incorporated ricotta cheese, an idea from a meatball recipe I'd heard about; ricotta lightens and moistens the meat loaf, giving it a fluffier texture and ensuring against its being dry. It has become part of my basic meat loaf formula, a forgiving essential mix that seems to accommodate endless variations. Served warm, it makes for a simple, satisfying supper. Served cold, thinly sliced and sandwiched between slices of toasted country bread, it gains in sophistication, an American-style terrine.

Serves 6 to 8

Ingredients:

2 tsp vegetable oil
1 medium onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
½ cup dry white wine
1 ¼ pounds lean ground pork
¾ pound ground turkey (12 oz)
1 ½ cups fresh bread crumbs
¾ cup grated Parmigiano
½ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
1 cup ricotta
½ cup milk
2 large eggs
1 tbsp fresh rosemary leaves, minced, or 1 tsp crumbled dried rosemary
1 tbsp fresh thyme leaves, minced, or 1 tsp dried thyme
1 ¼ tsp coarsely ground black pepper
1 tsp kosher salt
4 oz thinly sliced bacon

Method:

Sauté the onions and other aromatics or vegetables. Preheat the oven to 325F. In a small skillet, combine the oil and the onion; cover and cook over low heat until the onions are translucent, about 3 minutes. Uncover, increase the heat to moderate, and sauté, stirring frequently, until browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, 1 minute longer. Then add the wine and simmer until the liquid has evaporated, 3 minutes. Remove from the heat.

An Ever-Improvisational Meat Loaf continued...

Combine the meats with bread crumbs and flavorings. In a large bowl, combine the pork, turkey, the onion mixture, bread crumbs, Parmigiano, parsley, ricotta, milk, eggs, rosemary, thyme, pepper, and salt. Mix by hand until well blended.

Scoop the mixture into the center of a large heavy nonstick baking pan. Shape into a loaf about 10 x 5 inches. Lay the strips of bacon over the loaf.

Bake the meat loaf for 1 hour 15 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes until an instant-read meat thermometer inserted into the center reads 160F. Let cool slightly and remove the bacon, if desired. Blot up the fat in the pan with paper towels before slicing.

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