



sharing our Greek culinary heritage

Sofia's Traditional Moussaka

Sofia's Traditional Moussaka is based on a recipe my cousin Sofia Tsourvaka-Karaskosta shared with me. She resides in Kastraki, Greece and is a fabulous cook!

Preparing the meat sauce

You will need...

- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil (EVOO)
- 4 medium onions, finely chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1.2kg beef mince, full fat
- 1.2kg canned, diced tomato - puréed
- 1 large bunch parsley - finely chopped
- 2 large sticks cinnamon
- 4 bay leaves
- 2 whole nutmegs
- 8 whole cloves
- 4 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper

- Sauté the onions in the olive oil until they begin to brown
- Add the mince-meat and push down on it with a wooden spoon to help break it down
- Continue mixing and pushing down on the mince until it cooks through and browns a little
- Add the puréed tomatoes and mix through
- Add a little water to any tomato residue remaining in the cans or food processor (if either used), swirl to release the residue and add that water to the pot

- Add the parsley and mix in well
- Place the cloves and nutmeg in a closed tea-strainer or bouquet-garni container. Place it in the pot and add the cinnamon sticks, bay leaves, parsley, salt and pepper
- Simmer until all the water has reduced, leaving a layer of orange-hued oil on top - about an hour or so
- Remove the cinnamon, bay leaves and tea-strainer from the pot

Preparing the eggplants and potatoes

You will need...

4 extra large potatoes

3-4 large eggplants

- Peel the potatoes and trim them to form a rectangular block
- Cut them into thick, rectangular slices (2cm thick)
- Bake the potato slices at 200°C, ensuring they brown nicely on both sides
- Top and tail the eggplants
- Cut them lengthways into thick, rectangular slices (2-3cm thick)
- Bake the eggplant slices at 200°C, again ensuring they brown nicely on both sides

Assembling the moussaka

You will need...

Cooked potato slices

Cooked eggplants slices

Meat sauce

400g feta cheese, crumbled

- Line the base of a large baking dish with the cooked potatoes ensuring no gaps remain
- Spoon one half of the meat sauce onto the cooked potatoes
- Layer the cooked eggplants on top, ensuring no gaps remain (Sofia suggests orienting the eggplants perpendicular to the potatoes)
- Spoon the remaining meat sauce on top
- Sprinkle top evenly with the feta

Preparing the bechamel sauce

You will need...

2 litres full-cream milk
2 whole eggs
225g sifted plain flour
100g salted butter

- Place all ingredients in a pot on medium heat and stir continuously with a whisk, until all the flour is combined and the butter has melted
- Continue to heat and stir the sauce until it thickens and shows the first signs of bubbling
- Remove from the heat and pour on top of the final meat sauce layer
- Using the back of a spoon or a spatula, spread the béchamel evenly across the top of the moussaka

Finishing the moussaka

- Drizzle the top of the moussaka sparingly with EVOO and generously top with finely grated kasseri

Baking the moussaka

- Bake the moussaka at 200°C for approximately 30-40 minutes, until the top has browned
- Keep an eye on the moussaka as it bakes and place pieces of either baking paper or aluminium foil over the areas that have browned
- Continue to do this until the entire moussaka has browned on top

Serving the moussaka

- Allow the moussaka to cool and set for 1 hour before serving
- Serve and enjoy!
- Recipe makes 12-16 serves

Key Points

- As the water content in the meat sauce reduces during the simmering process, the heat setting on your cooktop also needs to be lowered; otherwise you run the risk of burning the sauce. Keep an eye on your sauce and your cook-top heat setting!
- Since documenting this recipe, Sofia now adds half a bunch of chopped basil to her sauce too. She says it makes her sauce even more flavoursome

- Do not overcook the sauce or the beautiful infusion of spices will be overwhelmed by the overcooked flavour of the oil, tomato and meat
- You can fry the eggplants and potatoes if you prefer
- Continuous stirring and patience is essential for the béchamel sauce. If you do not stir the sauce it may 'catch' or burn at the base of the pot and then when you do stir it, small brown fragments will appear throughout your sauce - not a good look!
- The béchamel sauce is ready to pour once it starts bubbling. It will appear runny when you're pouring it into the pan, but do not worry, as it will thicken further in the baking process and it will set and firm up during the cooling phase
- If the moussaka cools for longer than 2 hours, reheat it covered at 180°C for approximately 30 minutes before serving
- The recipe halves perfectly!