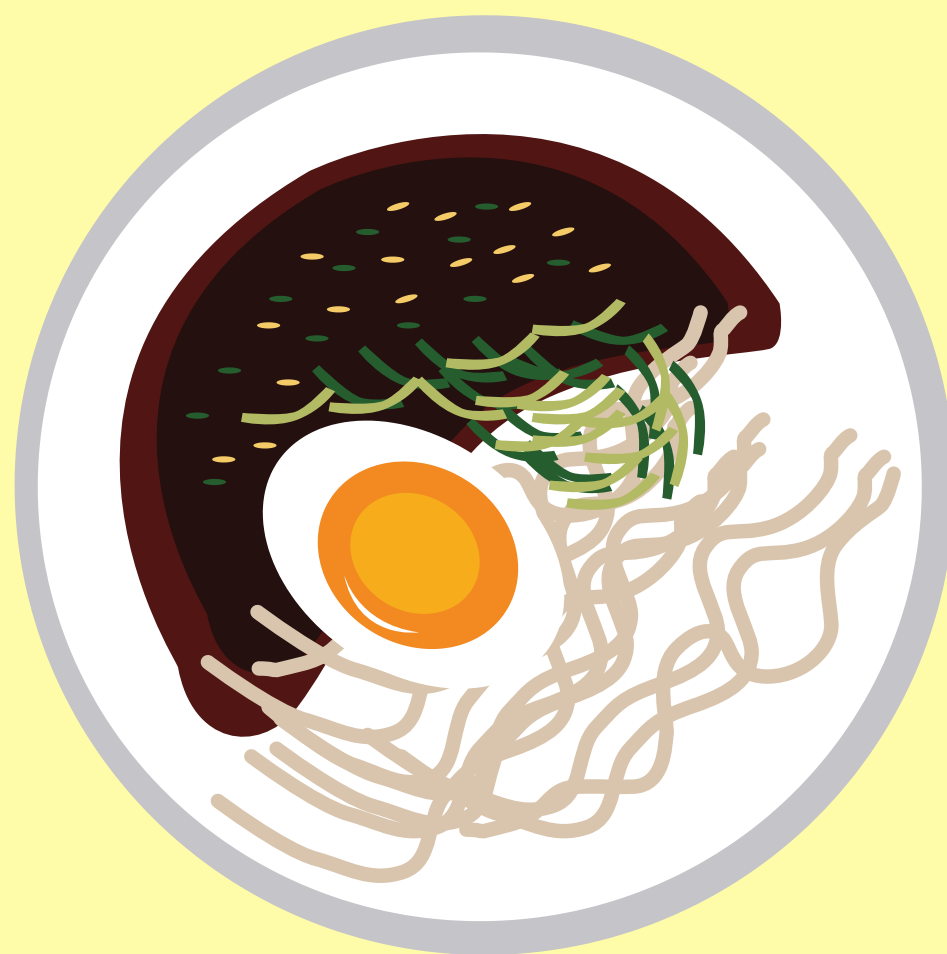


Mystery- Movie Cozy

Bubbling Skillet Baked Ziti with Mozzarella

A bubbling skillet of pasta, rich tomato sauce, savory Italian sausage, creamy ricotta, and stretchy melted mozzarella. This hearty one-pan dinner is made for suspenseful movie nights when you want comfort food without a sink full of dishes.



PREP: 10 minutes • COOK: 35–40 minutes • SERVES: 4–6

YOU'LL NEED

For the Skillet Pasta

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 12 ounces mild Italian sausage, casings removed
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes, optional
- 24 ounces marinara sauce
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable stock
- 12 ounces dry ziti or penne

For the Cheesy Topping

- ½ cup ricotta cheese
- 1½ cups shredded mozzarella
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan
- 2 tablespoons fresh basil, chopped

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO

1. Preheat and prepare

Heat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Place a large oven-safe skillet over medium heat and add the olive oil.

2. Brown the sausage

Add the sausage and chopped onion. Cook for 6–7 minutes, breaking the sausage into small pieces, until browned and the onion softens. Drain excess grease if needed.

3. Add the aromatics

Stir in the garlic, Italian seasoning, and optional red pepper flakes. Cook for 30 seconds, just until fragrant.

4. Simmer the pasta

Add the marinara sauce, stock, and dry pasta. Stir well and bring to a gentle simmer.

5. Cook until nearly tender

Cover and cook for 14–17 minutes, stirring every 5 minutes to prevent sticking. Check the pasta near the end of the cooking time. If it needs more liquid, add a little extra stock.

6. Add the cheese

Dollop the ricotta over the pasta. Sprinkle evenly with mozzarella and Parmesan.

7. Bake until bubbling

Transfer the uncovered skillet to the oven and bake for 10–12 minutes, until the cheese melts and the edges bubble. Rest for 5 minutes, then finish with fresh basil.

MYSTERY-MOVIE TIPS

Make it meatless:

Replace the sausage with sliced mushrooms and one cup of drained white beans. Sauté the mushrooms until their moisture evaporates before adding the remaining ingredients. Pasta still firm? Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup stock, cover, and cook for another 3–5 minutes, checking until the pasta reaches your preferred tenderness.

Extra cheesy finish:

Reserve a small handful of mozzarella to sprinkle over the top during the final few minutes of baking.

Serving idea:

Serve with garlic bread and a crisp green salad. Keep the skillet warm on a heat-safe trivet while the mystery unfolds.

QUICK FAQ

Can I make this without meat?

Absolutely. Mushrooms and white beans create a hearty vegetarian version. Use vegetable stock.

Why is my pasta still firm?

The pasta may need more liquid or cooking time. Add a little stock, cover, and continue cooking until tender.

Can I prepare it ahead?

For the best texture, cook the pasta shortly before serving. You can chop the vegetables and measure the ingredients ahead of time. Refrigerate leftovers promptly.

One skillet, plenty of cheese, and a plot twist in every bite.