

Missy Robbins' Spaghetti and Meatballs

Adapted by Adam Roberts for [The Amateur Gourmet Newsletter](#)

From Missy Robbins new cookbook *Pasta*

Ingredients:

For the meatballs:

2 cups torn day-old country bread or sourdough (I removed the crusts before tearing)
2 cups whole milk (you can use water or chicken stock if you're dealing with anyone lactose intolerant)
½ cup olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
3 fat cloves of garlic, finely chopped
1 pound ground beef (the higher percentage of fat, the juicier the meatballs)
1 pound ground pork
3 large eggs, gently whisked together
½ cup finely grated Pecorino Romano
½ cup finely grated Parmesan (use the good stuff)
1 tablespoon fennel seed
2 teaspoons salt, plus more to taste (you'll make a test meatball)
1 tablespoon dried red chile flakes (I used half of that, but I'm a wimp)
1 ½ teaspoons garlic powder (love that she uses garlic powder)
50 grinds black pepper (love that specificity)
¼ cup finely chopped Italian flat-leaf parsley (my own addition)

For the tomato sauce:

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
8 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
Dried red chile flakes
3 large 28-ounce cans whole San Marzano tomatoes, crushed by hand
Kosher salt

To finish:

1 pound spaghetti or bucatini
Olive oil
¼ cup finely grated Pecorino Romano
Lots of chopped fresh parsley or, if you have it, chiffonaded basil

1. Start by soaking your bread. Tear the bread into small pieces and let soak in a bowl with the milk for 30 to 45 minutes, until completely softened.
2. Meanwhile, sauté the onion in ¼ cup of the olive oil over gentle heat until it starts to turn translucent. Add the garlic and sauté 30 seconds more, just until you can smell it. Scrape into a bowl and allow to cool completely (quick tip: pop it into the freezer).

3. In a large bowl, combine the beef, the pork, the cooled onion/garlic mixture, plus the eggs, both cheeses, fennel, salt, chile flakes, garlic powder, and pepper and mix well with your hands.
4. Squeeze the liquid out of the bread and break it into small crumb-like pieces, sprinkling all over the meat mixture. Then work it in with your hands so it's evenly distributed. Gradually add the remaining ¼ cup of olive oil while working it with your hands to incorporate. Make a test meatball¹ to see if the seasoning is right.
5. Cover the meat mixture with plastic and refrigerate for 30 minutes to an hour.
6. While the meat is refrigerating, make the sauce. In a large pot or Dutch oven big enough to hold all of the meatballs later, heat the olive oil over medium heat until it shimmers. Add the garlic and cook for 30 seconds or so – you don't want any color on it – then add a pinch of chile flakes to your liking. Add the tomatoes, season with salt (at least a teaspoon if not more), bring to a simmer, and lower to a gentle simmer. Cook for 25 to 30 minutes until all of the flavors are combined (you don't want it to reduce too much). Taste for seasoning and set aside.
7. Now it's time to shape your meatballs. Line a sheet pan with aluminum foil and spray it with cooking spray. Using a large ice cream scoop, form the mixture into 17 to 20 balls, each about 112 grams (I actually weighed them!). Place on the prepared sheet pan and refrigerate for another 30 minutes to an hour to help them keep their shape.
8. If you're cooking the meatballs in the oven, a much neater way to do it (and Missy's recommended way), preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Remove the meatballs from the refrigerator and bake them for 10 to 15 minutes until golden brown on the outside (they'll finish cooking in the sauce).
9. Bring the tomato sauce back to a simmer and slowly and carefully add your meatballs. Lower the heat to the gentlest simmer and cook until the meatballs are cooked through (160 degrees).
10. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and season with salt. Drop your spaghetti or bucatini into the boiling water and while that's cooking, use a large spoon to carefully remove the meatballs to a large platter. Ladle out a few cups of the sauce and set aside (you won't need all of that sauce for this amount of pasta).
11. When the pasta is just al dente – two minutes less than package directions – use tongs to lift into the pot with the sauce. Add a splash of pasta cooking water, turn up the heat, and swirl all around with tongs so the pasta finishes cooking in the sauce, absorbing as much as possible. If it doesn't look saucy enough, add some of the reserved sauce.

¹ To make a test meatball, heat a splash of olive oil in a non-stick skillet until shimmering. Take a tiny ping pong ball size piece of the meat mixture and add it to the pan and cook all over, until cooked through, and then taste. That's what your meatballs are going to taste like, so if you think it needs more salt, pepper, garlic powder, etc., work it into the rest of the meat mixture now!

12. To plate: twirl the pasta on to four plates, top with some of the meatballs, drizzle with olive oil, and garnish with lots of parsley and lots of cheese.