



Nuevo Latino Meatballs

Makes Approximately 36 Meatballs

This classic Italian meatball recipe takes on the undeniably refreshing influence of Latin-American flavors. The recipe, complete with a pineapple, jalapeño peppers and a honey glaze, comes together quickly with the aid of a food processor so you can whip up a batch in no time. Best of all, these little delights can be made ahead and frozen. They go from freezer to oven to table in less than one hour. Because there is a high proportion of wet ingredients added to the ground meat, these meatballs are delicate. Follow the recipe closely to achieve your best results. Use fresh pineapple in its own juice if available and round out to the 2 cups of juice needed for the glaze with as high a quality pineapple juice as you can find.



Ingredients:

For the glaze:

- 2 cups pineapple juice
- 2 large jalapeño peppers, stemmed, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 2 tablespoons honey

For the meatballs:

- 2 slices white bread
- Splash of milk (about 1/8 cup) to moisten the bread
- 1 – 1 1/2 ground pork, or a combination of ground -pork, -beef and -veal
- 1 egg lightly beaten
- 2 chipotle chilies in adobo sauce, seeded and chopped, plus 2 teaspoons adobo sauce
- 1 can (15.5 ounce) black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 medium red onion, finely chopped
- 1 small red pepper, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup finely chopped pineapple
- 2 tablespoons cream cheese
- 3 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon allspice

For service (optional):

- Warmed pita, or other flat breads
- Avocado slices
- Sour cream or crème fraîche
- Shredded lettuce, or an herb salad of cilantro, parsley and watercress

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Preparation:

Make the glaze:

Place the pineapple juice, jalapeño peppers, and honey in a small, heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring the mixture to a boil and immediately reduce the heat to low. Simmer the mixture until it is reduced by half, about 15 minutes. Remove the jalapeños with a slotted spoon and discard. Reserve.

Make the meatballs:

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Line 2 rimmed cookie sheets with parchment paper or a non-stick liner.

Moisten the bread with the milk and mix with your hands until the milk is absorbed and the bread is paste-like. If the bread becomes too wet, squeeze the excess milk from the bread before using.

In a large mixing bowl, add the ground meat, the bread mixture and the egg. Reserve.

Place the seasoning ingredients for the meatballs (the chipotle chilies, black beans, red onion, red pepper, pineapple, cream cheese, garlic, salt and allspice) into the bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal blade. Pulse until finely chopped and well combined, about 10 to 12 pulses (there will still be some chunky pieces of the seasonings). Remove the blade from food processor and add the seasoning mixture to the ground meat. Mix with your hands until just combined. *Chef's Note: Start with about half of the seasonings and add additional amount in proportion to the amount of ground meat used. The recipe proportions are for a full 1 1/2 pounds of ground meat.*

Shape bite size meatballs using a small (about 2- to 4- ounce) ice cream or cookie scoop. The meatballs should be firmly packed. Drop meatballs onto a rimmed baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Use moistened hands to shape the meatballs, if necessary. *Chef's Note: The meatballs hold their shape in the oven if they are very cold. I recommend placing the prepared pans in a freezer for about 1/2 hour before baking.*

Bake in a preheated oven until nicely browned, about 30 to 40 minutes (depending on the size of your meatballs). Drizzle each with a bit of the glaze; reserve the remaining glaze to serve with the meatballs. Return to the oven and continue baking for another 10 to 12 minutes, until the meatballs are cooked through and the glaze is just beginning to caramelize. *Note: the glaze will burn quickly once it starts to caramelize. The meatballs should take no longer than an additional 10 to 12 minutes after they are glazed.*

Remove from the oven and allow to set in the pan, about 5 minutes. Carefully transfer the meatballs to your serving dish.

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To freeze the meatballs and glaze:

Place the meatballs on the prepared sheets in the freezer until firm, about 2 hours. Transfer the meatballs to an airtight freezer bag or storage container and store, frozen, for up to 2 months. Place the cooled glaze in an airtight container and freeze for up to 2 months.

To serve frozen meatballs:

Thaw the glaze overnight in the refrigerator, or with the aid of a microwave oven. Place the frozen meatballs on a rimmed cookie sheet lined with parchment paper or a non-stick liner. Bake the frozen meatballs in a preheated 375°F oven for 35 to 40 minutes. Drizzle with glaze. Continue baking until the meatballs are cooked through and the glaze is just beginning to caramelize, about 10 to 12 minutes more.

To Serve:

Place the glazed meatballs into a warmed serving dish. Serve with warmed pita bread, or other flat bread, avocado slices, sour cream or crème fraîche, and shredded lettuce or an herb salad of cilantro, parsley and watercress.

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