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Béchamel Sauce

4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter
6 tablespoons unbleached all-purpose flour
2 cups milk
Salt, to taste
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
Freshly grated nutmeg, to taste

1. Melt the butter in a heavy saucepan over low heat. Sprinkle in the flour and cook gently, stirring almost constantly, for 5 minutes. Do not let the flour and butter brown at all.
2. Meanwhile, bring the milk to a boil. When the milk reaches a boil, remove the butter and flour mixture from the heat and pour in the boiling milk all at once. As the mixture boils and bubbles beat it vigorously with a wire whisk.
3. When the bubbling stops, return the pan to medium heat and bring the béchamel to a boil, stirring constantly for 5 minutes. Season with the salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Use at once, or scrape into a bowl, cover, and refrigerate.

2 cups thick sauce

Note: For thinner sauce, use 3 tablespoons butter and 1/4 cup all-purpose flour with the same amount of milk.

Spinach Lasagna with Béchamel Sauce

Prepare this vegetarian lasagna with béchamel sauce as you would traditional tomato-based lasagna – layers and layers of wonderful flavors building on each other and melding together.

Noodle Layer

- 1 package of lasagna noodles
- 5 quarts boiling, salted water

Boil the lasagna noodles until just barely tender. Drain noodles in a colander, rinsing gently and cooling in the process.

Béchamel Sauce

- 2 recipes of The Silver Palate's béchamel sauce
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 lb. mushrooms, sliced
- 1 large, sweet onion, diced finely
- 4 cloves of garlic, minced

Sauté the onions until just translucent. Add the mushrooms and garlic; continue sautéing until fully wilted. Prepare a double recipe of the above Béchamel Sauce. Add the onion mixture to the béchamel sauce.

Cheese Layer

- 1 lb. ricotta cheese, or cottage cheese
- 1/2 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 2 cups grated Parmesan cheese
- 4 eggs, beaten slightly
- 3 cups grated Mozzarella cheese, (reserve 1 cup for top)

Mix the cheeses and parsley together. Add the beaten eggs and combine thoroughly.

Vegetable Layer

- 1 lb. spinach, chopped
- 3 carrots, coarsely grated

Combine the chopped spinach and grated carrots; wilt in a sauté pan with a couple of tablespoons of water.

Spinach Lasagna with Béchamel Sauce, (continued)

1. Layer the lasagna in a 9" x 13" pan beginning with a cup of the Béchamel Sauce. Follow this with a layer of noodles. Spread one-third of the Cheese Mixture on top of the first layer of noodles, then one-third of the Vegetable Mixture, and one-fourth of the Béchamel Sauce. Repeat twice more finishing with the Béchamel Sauce.
2. Cover the assembled lasagna and bake in a 350° F oven for 1 hour. Uncover, add the remaining 1 cup of mozzarella cheese and bake for 15 minutes, or until the top is bubbly and golden brown.
3. Remove from the oven and let set for 10 minutes before cutting and serving.

Makes 12 pieces.