Vegetable Manicotti

Courtesy of Carole's Creations

Prep Time: 30 minutes
Cooking Time: 40 minutes
Serves: 5
CChints: Manicotti is a tubular pasta shell that is about 1 inch in diameter and 4 inches long. They are traditionally stuffed with a creamy cheese mixture and this recipes combines the cheese with roasted vegetables. Asiago cheese is similar to parmesan but delivers its own unique flavor.

24 ounce jar of your favorite marinara sauce (3 cups)
1 medium zucchini squash, shredded and squeezed dry
1/2 cup chopped sweet yellow onion
2 teaspoons olive oil
1 teaspoon salt, divide
1/2 teaspoon fresh black pepper, divided
2 cloves minced garlic
10 ounce box frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
12 manicotti shells
15 ounce container of part skim Ricotta cheese
1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
1 egg, slightly beaten
1 cup fresh grated Asiago cheese, divided
2 tablespoons fresh basil, chopped
2 tablespoons fresh oregano, chopped
Optional – side salad

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. and locate a 9x13 baking pan. Pour 1 cup of sauce in the bottom of the pan and set it aside.

Shred the zucchini and onion in a food processor. Lay in a clean dish towel or several layers of paper towels. Squeeze over the sink to get out all the excess liquid.

Heat the oil over medium heat in a nonstick skillet. When the oil is hot add the zucchini and onions to the pan. Sauté for 5 minutes until they start to brown. Add half of the salt and pepper, spinach, and garlic, stir occasionally for 1 more minute and remove from the pan and allow to cool while you prepare the rest of the recipe.

Cook the pasta according to package directions and drain when done. Fill the pot with cold water so they float and don't tear under the pressure of lying on top of each other. While they are cooking, you can prepare the cream stuffing.

In a mixing bowl combine the ricotta cheese, mozzarella cheese, egg and 1/2 cup Asiago cheese. Then add the spinach through pepper and stir in the zucchini and onions. Blend all together well. Set aside to allow the flavors to blend while you wait on the pasta.

There are a couple of ways to stuff the shells. Carefully spoon the mixture into a pastry bag and squeeze it in or put in the sealable plastic bag and cut a corner off and squeeze the mixture in the shells.

Lay them side by side in the baking pan. Pour in the remaining marinara sauce and sprinkle the tops of each shell with the remaining cheese. Bake for 30 minutes, remove from the oven and let stand for 10 minutes. Serve with a side salad.