

Meatballs Simmered in a Fresh Tomato Sauce

Albondigas di karne kon tomat

For the meatballs:

1 small onion;
1 egg, lightly beaten;
3 slices white bread, crusts removed, dampened in ½ cup water, squeezed and torn into small pieces;
500g (1lb 2oz) lean minced (ground) beef or chicken breast;
1 ripe tomato, halved and; coarsely grated (about 1 tbsp);
½ cup finely chopped flat-leaf parsley;
¼ cup finely chopped fresh dill;
1 tbsp olive oil;
salt and finely ground white pepper

For the tomato sauce:

2 cups peeled, seeded and chopped ripe tomatoes or canned chopped tomatoes;
2 tender celery stalks with leaves, cut into chunks;
2 tbsp olive oil;
1 tsp sugar; salt and finely ground white pepper

For dredging:

½ cup plain (all-purpose) flour in a shallow plate

To serve:

1 tbsp fresh lemon juice;
1 tbsp each of finely chopped flat-leaf parsley and fresh dill;
1 tbsp toasted pine nuts

Prepare the meatballs: Grate the onion finely into a strainer (sieve) set over a small bowl. Sprinkle with salt and leave to stand for 10 minutes. Press down with the back of a spoon to squeeze out the juice. Discard the onion. Combine the onion juice with the remaining meatball ingredients in a large bowl. Knead well. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for about 15 minutes.

Make the tomato sauce: In a large, shallow, heavy-based pan bring all the tomato sauce ingredients to a boil over a medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to medium and cook for 5 minutes.

Shape the meatballs with dampened hands into about 30 small meatballs. Dredge the meatballs in the flour, to coat lightly, patting off the excess.

Drop the meatballs gently into the pan with the tomato sauce. When all the meatballs have been added, pour in a little simmering water so that the sauce comes about halfway up the meatballs. Cover and continue to

cook at a very low simmer for 20 minutes, until the meatballs are tender and the sauce has thickened. Shake the pan from time to time to ensure the sauce evenly coats the meatballs and prevents them from sticking to the pan. Add a little more hot water if necessary.

To serve: Drizzle in the lemon juice and scatter with the fresh herbs, and toasted pine nuts.

➤ ***Twist on Tradition:***

Add 1 tsp ground cumin to the meatball mixture and a pinch of Turkish red pepper flakes to the tomato sauce for that extra kick of flavour.