

ERIC YOST

White Dog Café | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Bolognese is a slow-cooked meat sauce typically used to dress tagliatelle pasta. This recipe calls for traditional ingredients and techniques with one exception: Lamb takes the place of veal or beef and gets a spicy kick from a liberal dose of red pepper flakes. The dollop of creamy pesto made with basil and ricotta that tops each tangle of noodles offsets the richness of the sauce perfectly. SERVES 4 TO 6

Spicy Lamb Bolognese with Basil Ricotta on Fettuccine

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
½ medium sweet onion, preferably Vidalia,
cut into ¼-inch dice (about 1 cup)
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 tablespoons fennel seed
1 tablespoon crushed red pepper flakes;
more as needed
1 pound ground lamb, preferably pastured
¼ cup dry white wine
6 cups crushed tomatoes
(two 28-ounce cans)
2 tablespoons tomato paste
½ cup packed fresh basil leaves,
coarsely chopped
½ cup loosely packed, fresh, flat-leaf
parsley leaves, coarsely chopped
1½ tablespoons fresh thyme leaves,
finely chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 pound fresh or dry fettuccine or linguine,
cooked according to the package
directions
Basil Ricotta (recipe on the facing page)

Heat the olive oil in a large nonreactive saucepan over low heat. Add the onions, garlic, fennel seed, and red pepper flakes. Cook, stirring frequently, until the onions are soft and translucent but not brown, about 10 minutes.

Increase the heat to medium and add the lamb. Sauté the mixture, stirring frequently, for about 5 minutes or until the lamb is no longer pink. Add the wine and cook until most of it has evaporated, about 3 minutes. Skim off and discard any fat from the top of the mixture.

Add the tomatoes and tomato paste and reduce the heat to low. Cook, uncovered, stirring and scraping the bottom of the saucepan frequently, until the sauce has thickened, 1½ to 2 hours.

To serve, stir the basil, parsley, and thyme into the sauce. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and more red pepper flakes, if desired. Serve over your favorite pasta topped with a dollop of Basil Ricotta.

Combine the basil, Parmigiano, and garlic in the bowl of a food processor. Process until finely chopped. With the motor running, slowly add the olive oil and process until the mixture is the consistency of pesto. Remove the mixture to a large bowl and fold in the ricotta.

Basil Ricotta

MAKES 1 CUP

½ cup firmly packed, fresh, basil leaves
2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmigiano-
Reggiano
1 small clove garlic
¼ cup olive oil
½ cup fresh whole-milk ricotta

Combine the basil, Parmigiano, and garlic in the bowl of a food processor. Process until finely chopped. With the motor running, slowly add the olive oil and process until the mixture is the consistency of pesto. Remove the mixture to a large bowl and fold in the ricotta.

Choosing Pastured Lamb

Sheep raised for meat are often of English origin, with names that conjure up images of quaint hamlets in the countryside—Dorset, Hampshire, Cheviot, Cotswold. Heritage breeds have become popular because they require minimal care, add to genetic diversity, and expand the offering of flavors and textures. Though they're generally raised for specific purposes—meat, milk, and wool—there is some overlap of "eaters" and "knitters."

Because their nutritional needs are few, sheep can be raised, in most states, on land unsuited for any other domesticated animal. They thrive on sparse natural forage, producing meat of exceptionally high quality on a diet of grass and mother's milk. Period. Like calves, lambs destined for the commodity market start out on pasture

and are finished in feedlots.

Sheep are grazing animals that belong on grass; grain isn't necessary to finish lamb, but it is sometimes used as a supplement for sheep with special nutritional needs, including pregnant ewes and ewes nursing two or more lambs. Lamb cannot be marketed as hormone free since the meat has naturally occurring, benign hormones.

The commodity market doesn't observe a strict marketing season for lamb, but if we were to identify one, it might be between the beginning of March and the end of September. The notion of spring lamb is an antiquated one.

Leaner than its grain-fed counterpart, pastured lamb is best eaten at medium rare.