

Mama's Meatballs

Recipe courtesy of Patrick McKee, founder of Estes Pasta

Serves 4-6 | 15 minutes prep + 20 minutes cook time

On regular rotation in Patrick's own home, these meatballs are a deeply satisfying homage to McKee's Kansas City childhood. He has fond memories of his Italian/Irish family gathering for meals, and his mother relied on recipes passed down from her mother, who had emigrated from Italy. Those same recipes—filtered through decades of professional kitchen experience—have been driving Estes, Patrick's once-a-week pop-up at Portland wine bar Dame named for his grandmother. Believe us when we tell you that you can taste Nonna Estes' love in every bite.

For the meatballs:

1lb ground beef (80/20)

1lb ground pork

114g (about half of a medium yellow onion), **diced small**

6g (1-2 cloves) garlic, minced

pinch chile flakes

58g grana padano (you can use a good quality parmigiano if you don't have grana)

1 egg

13g parsley, chopped

10g salt

1-2 tablespoons olive oil (We of course prefer olive oil but Patrick uses canola or rice bran oil for frying the meatballs)

Step 1 Combine the beef, pork, onion, minced garlic, grana padano, egg, parsley, salt and a pinch of chile flakes in a bowl and mix thoroughly. Patrick likes to use a stand mixer with a paddle attachment if possible, because you really want to incorporate all ingredients well. If the mix seems sticky, that's good, because it means the meatballs will hold together! At his restaurant, Patrick weighs the meatballs into 3 oz, but you can use any size that you prefer.

Step 2 Heat 1-2 tablespoons of oil in a cast iron skillet over medium-high heat, and preheat your oven to 350°. When the oil is hot, brown a few meatballs at a time. Work in batches and be sure not to crowd your pan. Once evenly browned on all sides, remove the meatballs from the pan and set aside on a tray lined with a napkin to let drain.

Step 3 Heat the olive oil in a heavy bottom pot over medium-low heat; add the sliced garlic, a pinch of chile flakes, and gently fry until aromatic, 1 or 2 minutes. Make sure not to brown the garlic, as it will become bitter. Add the blended tomatoes and basil and slowly bring to a simmer. Adjust seasoning, then add your meatballs to the sauce. Transfer the pot of sauce and meatballs to the oven, and cook for another 1 – 1 ½ hrs, depending on the size of your meatballs.

Step 4 When the meatballs get close to being done, cook whatever pasta you'd like to serve. In Italy, meatballs are traditionally served as a side dish, where in America, they are traditionally served with spaghetti. the meatballs into 3 oz, but you can use any size that you prefer.

For the marinara:

1 - 12 oz can whole plum san marzano tomatoes, either chopped or blended

1-2 tablespoons olive oil

3 cloves garlic, sliced thin

pinch chile flake

a few basil leaves

salt & pepper to taste