

MEATLESS MONDAY: ALMOST! MOUSSAKA BAKE W/LENTILS [VEGAN & GLUTEN FREE]

Serves: 6-8

Prep: 10 mins

Cooking Time: (50 mins for the components + 30 mins in the oven)

Total Time: 1h 30 mins

Type: Main Meal

Tools: Sieve, large baking tray, kitchen foil, chopping board, sharp knife, 2*non-stick pots (w/lids), colander, fork, whisk, wooden spoon, measuring jug, large casserole dish, serving spoon, cooling block (or rack)

Courtesy of: Eat2Health Blog



We haven't been to Greece (yet!), but it doesn't mean that we can't enjoy some of their fantastic flavours and cuisine all in the comfort of our own home. Our Almost! Moussaka bake integrates some traditional ingredients with some that are less-so because as you know, we love veggies! However, moussaka isn't typically known for its veggies, but its rich meaty sauce and great flavours. Fear not, our plant-based version is deliciously fragrant and satisfying to the last bite. Enjoy tasty mouthfuls of Greek-style tomato-based sauce (with lentils), tender baby potatoes, roasted aubergine and our 'cheezy' béchamel sauce. In the end it might take a bit longer to make, but we ensure you that it's worth it!

Ingredients

Greek-Style Ragu (w/ Lentils)			
200g	Dried Lentils (about 2 tins/drained)	½ -3/4 tsp	Salt
200g	Brown Onion		Ground Black Pepper
12g	Garlic Clove (about 3!)	1.2kg	Tinned Plum Tomatoes
260g	Red Bell Pepper	115g	Tomato Puree (about ½ cup)
	Low-Fat Cooking Oil	100g	Fresh Baby Spinach, (or 120g Frozen, defrosted/about 6 cubes)
	<u>Greek Inspired Spice Blend</u> (6g of each: dried oregano, ground cinnamon and allspice)	½-1 Tbsp	Agave Syrup (10-20g)
Moussaka Staples		'Cheezy' Béchamel Sauce	
	Low-Fat Cooking Oil	40g	Vegan Margarine
700g	Aubergine	40g	Plain GF Flour
	Dried Oregano	550ml	Soya Milk (unsweetened & fortified) (+ a possible additional 100-150ml)
	Salt & Ground Black Pepper	1- 1¼ tsp	Dried oregano (2-3g)
650-700g	Baby Potatoes	½ -3/4 tsp	Salt
2 tbsp	Fresh Chives (*optional) (6g)		Ground black pepper
		6g	Nutritional Yeast Flakes

Directions

- 1. If applicable, cook your lentils.** Place the lentils into a sieve. Remove any stones and/or seeds. Rinse under running water. Cook according to the packet instructions. Drain and rinse. **Tip:** Ours took about 15mins (they were tender, but not mushy!)

2. Preheat the oven to 220°C/430°F/ gas mark 7. Line a baking tray with some kitchen foil. Spray the foil with some low-fat cooking oil.
3. **Prepare the aubergine.** Wash the aubergine(s); trim off the top(s) and then slice it (width-wise) into ½ cm slices. *Tip: if preferred (and depending on the size of your casserole dish), slice the aubergine lengthwise.* Place the aubergine slices onto the tray in a single layer. Spray it with some low-fat cooking oil. Thoroughly season it to taste; sprinkle and season it with a little salt, dried oregano and a few grinds of black pepper. When the oven is hot, place the tray onto the upper oven shelf. Bake for 25 mins, turning halfway through. *Tip: Once turned, respray with oil and add a little more seasoning.* Remove and leave on the tray until ready to use.
4. **In the meantime, cook the potatoes.** Wash the potatoes. Place them into a pot covered with some cold water. Cover with a lid. Bring to a boil. Simmer and cook for about 8-10 mins or until just cooked (but not falling apart). Drain in a colander. Rinse under cold water and then allow to cool.
5. **Meanwhile, prepare the Greek-style ragu with lentils.** Peel and finely chop the onion. Peel, roughly chop and then mince the garlic with the back of a fork. *Tip: If you have a garlic press, use this handy gadget instead!* Wash, remove the stem and core then chop the bell pepper into ½cm-1cm pieces.

Spray a large, non-stick pot it with some low-fat cooking oil and place it over a medium-low heat. Add the onion, garlic and bell pepper. Gently fry for 2-3 mins or until softened. Add the **Greek-inspired spice blend** and a few grinds of black pepper. Stir to coat. Gently fry for a further 30 seconds or until fragrant. Add the tin tomatoes, cooked lentils and 115g tomato puree. Stir together. Cover with a lid. Bring to a boil. Cook and simmer for 20 mins. Add your spinach during the last 5 minutes, allowing it to wilt. *Tip: If you're using fresh spinach, just throw it into the pot and stir it through once the sauce has finished cooking.* Remove from the heat. Stir through ½-1 tbsp (10-20g) of agave. Recover with the lid and leave for the moment.

6. Meanwhile, prepare the potatoes. Transfer the cooked potatoes onto a chopping board. Gently slice them (lengthways) into ¼- ½ cm slices. Leave for the moment.
7. **Prepare the 'cheezy- béchamel sauce'.** Pour 550ml DF milk into a large measuring jug. Place 40g DF margarine into a non-stick pot and place it over a medium-low heat. *Tip: Save on dishes! Give your 'lentil pot' a quick wipe and use this to cook your sauce!* When the margarine it melts, add 40g flour. Whisk until thoroughly combined and for about a further 20-30 seconds to help remove the floury taste. Whilst whisking, gradually pour in the milk. Keep whisking to help dissolve all of the flour. Add 1- 1¼ tsp oregano, salt and a few grinds of black pepper. Keep whisking until the sauce just thickens. Remove from the heat. *Tip: If the mixture is too thick, just whisk through a little more milk.* Add the nutritional yeast or your vegan cheese. Stir through to combine (or if applicable) to melt the 'cheese'. Leave covered until you are ready to use.

8. **Assemble the moussaka!** *Tip: Depending on the size of your casserole dish, you can always free-style this type; if you would prefer to start with a potato layer, make sure to grease the dish first!* Scoop about 2.5 cups of the Greek-style ragu evenly into the base of the casserole dish. Place a single layer of potatoes (do not overlap). Pour over ¼ cup of the cheezy-béchamel sauce. Roughly spread it with the back of a large spoon or spatula. Place a layer (or a few pieces) of aubergine. *Tip: We used the minimum amount of aubergine, hence why we only placed a few pieces over the mixture at this point.* Scoop a further 2.5 cups of the ragu, spreading evenly. Place a final, single layer of potatoes. Pour and spread over the remaining ragu. Place a final layer of aubergine. Pour and evenly spread over the remaining cheezy-béchamel sauce.
9. Place the dish onto the middle oven shelf. Bake for about 25-30 mins or until the surface is lightly tanned and the edges are bubbling. *Tip: Allow it to cool and set for 5-10 mins (if you have the time) as this will allow for easier serving.* Top it with some nutritional yeast, ground black pepper and some chopped chives (if desired) before serving!

Enjoy!

Tip: Cover and refrigerate any leftovers; reheat and consume within 3-4 days. Alternatively, store and freeze in air-tight and resealable container(s); defrost, reheat and consume within 1-2 months.

Notes:

- Our Almost! Moussaka integrates some traditional ingredients with some that are less-so because as you know, we love veggies! In fact one serving (based on six servings) of this healthful and veganised moussaka provides you with about 6-7 servings of veggies towards your 5-A-Day! However, moussaka isn't typically known for its veggies but its rich meaty sauce and great flavours! So to help keep an authentic taste, this dish also uses:
 - A Greek-style ragu that incorporates traditional moussaka seasonings, extra veggies and some lentils for a little added texture, protein and faux 'meatiness'.
 - Some small baby potatoes instead of standard/floury baking potatoes; which contains a lower G.I index than the latter.
 - An adapted white/ herby DF sauce. We added some nutritional yeast and fewer herbs to form a vegan and gluten free friendly 'cheezy-béchamel sauce'.
- Although we would normally recommend using dried pulses and legumes (at least where and when you can), this time you might want to take a short cut. We've used some dried lentils, but feel free to use a cooked and packaged or a tinned variety instead to save some time (it won't affect the recipe)!
- You can always use slightly more aubergine (eggplant), perhaps 100-200g more, if you desire or can fit it into your budget! Also, make sure to properly season it before adding it into the moussaka (otherwise it might taste a bit bitter).
- We recommend that you thoroughly cook the potatoes before adding them into the moussaka because otherwise it will take a lot longer to cook; about 45-60mins.

- If your béchamel sauce is left sitting around (especially without a lid) it will start to form a skin and slightly congeal. However, you can always add a little more milk to help loosen and relax it; just whisk the milk through until the sauce is smooth and fluid.
- If you are using frozen spinach, make sure it's thoroughly defrosted, drained and then roughly chopped before adding it into the Greek-style ragu; otherwise it won't integrate into the sauce properly and/or make it a bit watery.
- We used quite a large casserole dish (a new one!). If yours is quite a bit smaller, you might need to reduce the ingredients (well, at least the ragu) by a third.
- Nutritional yeast is one of the few products we occasionally use that you can't easily purchase in shops (sorry folks). If you do not have any or would prefer not to use it, you can try using some dairy free cheese as a substitute. We are guesstimating that 10-20 grams of grated DF hard or cream cheese (melted into the béchamel sauce) will suffice. However, DF cheese will also help to thicken' sauces, so you might need to use a little extra milk to balance things out. Alternatively, you can always use a plain DF béchamel sauce or adapt it as preferred; perhaps with garlic and mustard powder, paprika and lemon for an alternative 'cheezy' taste'!
- Although this dish may look 'heavy' (it's not), it's just very deceiving! One portion, even accompanied with a light green salad or some green beans is just about right.
- Feel free to move through this recipe at your own speed. E.g. if you have finished chopping the aubergine, but the oven isn't up to temperature yet, just move on to the next step. You don't have to necessarily wait (unless you want to) to move on to the next step(s).
- Although this meal is slightly time consuming, it does last for more than one meal (unless you are actually serving six people)! However, it tastes great and hopefully you can appreciate that it has five different components to prepare (but don't let this scare you, nothing is overcomplicated here)!
- This may not be a typical mid-week meal that you can quickly whip up, it is one that you can cook when you have more time and/or as part of your weekend meal prep. The dish tastes great for 3-4 days; so try baking it over the weekend and enjoy it throughout the week!