

Zov's Meat Loaf

Many times meat loaf is made in a loaf pan, but I find this makes the meat loaf soggy and only allows a delicious golden brown crust to form on top of the meat loaf. So, instead, I bake my meat loaf on a rack set on top of a baking sheet so that it browns nicely all over. Lining the baking sheet with foil makes clean-up easier.

Serves 6

Nonstick vegetable oil cooking spray
1 cup (about 1 1/2 ounces) cubed day-old white bread
1/3 cup half and half
1 1/2 pounds ground beef (22% fat)
1/3 cup chopped fresh Italian parsley
1/3 cup finely chopped shallots
1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1/3 cup tomato paste
2 whole large eggs
1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano leaves
2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme leaves
1½ teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
1½ teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary leaves
1 teaspoon seasoned salt
Mushroom Sauce, see recipe below

Position the oven rack in the middle of the oven then preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a heavy large baking sheet with foil. Place a cooling rack atop the baking sheet. Spray the cooling rack with nonstick cooking spray.

Toss the bread cubes with the half and half in a large bowl to coat. Set aside until the bread is very soft and all of the liquid is absorbed, about 10 minutes. Add the ground beef, parsley, shallots, Parmesan cheese, tomato paste, eggs, oregano, thyme, pepper, salt, rosemary and seasoned salt. Using your hands, mix just until all of the ingredients are thoroughly blended but do not over mix since doing so causes the meat loaf to be tough.

Form the meat mixture into a 9x4-inch oval loaf. Set the meat loaf atop the prepared rack on the baking sheet. Bake for about 1 hour or until an instant-read meat thermometer registers 160°F when inserted into the center of the meat loaf. Let the meat loaf rest for 15 minutes (this will help keep the meat loaf moist). Using a large sharp knife cut the meat loaf crosswise into thick slices. Transfer the slices of meat loaf to plates. Spoon the the Mushroom Sauce over the meat loaf and serve.

Cook's Note: I love to serve my meat loaf with mashed potatoes and garnish it with crunchy onion rings. To make onion rings, simply peel and thinly slice a large yellow onion into very, very thin rings. Then, working in batches, dip the onion rings into 1 cup of buttermilk and then into rice flour to coat. Deep fry the coated onion rings in a large

frying pan filled halfway with hot vegetable oil until crisp. Transfer the onion rings to paper towels to drain any excess oil. DELICIOUS!! You must use rice flour since it is what gives the onion rings their crispy texture.

Mushroom Sauce

I like to use a combination of mushrooms for this luscious gravy-like sauce. Shiitake, enoki and cremini work well; however, I do not use white mushrooms since they tend to exude too much liquid when sautéed, which prevents the mushrooms from browning as well.

Makes 3 cups

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided

1 tablespoon olive oil

12 ounces fresh assorted mushrooms (such as cremini, enoki and stemmed shiitake), sliced

3 tablespoons finely chopped shallots

2 teaspoons finely chopped garlic

1 teaspoon chopped fresh oregano

2 tablespoons all purpose flour

2 cups hot beef broth

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon seasoned salt

Heat 2 tablespoons of butter with the oil in a heavy large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms and cook until they are nicely browned, stirring occasionally, about 5 minutes. Add the shallots, garlic and oregano and sauté until the shallots are tender and the garlic is fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the flour and mix well for 1 minute. Slowly add the hot broth, whisking until it is well incorporated. Bring the sauce to a simmer. Continue simmer for 2 minutes or until the sauce has thickened. Add the black pepper, salt and seasoned salt. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons butter and stir until well incorporated. The sauce should have the consistency of a creamy soup.