

# Baked Ham and Cheese Pasta

You will need a deep baking dish. I've included an image of my dish on the next page as a general guide. The image includes some of the pasta shells I use for general size also.

500g of large sized shell pasta (or any other shape of pasta that can hold stuffing)  
1 ½ to 2 cups grated parmesan cheese  
a few handfuls of basil leaves (optional)

## Filling

400g ricotta cheese  
250g mozzarella cheese, grated  
100g provolone cheese, mild or picante, grated  
150g sliced ham, finely diced  
2 hard boiled eggs, finely diced  
1 ½ to 2 cups grated parmesan cheese

## Tomato Sauce

¼ cup Olive Oil  
1-2 onions, finely chopped (optional)  
1-2 handfuls of fresh herbs – basil, rosemary, sage, thyme, oregano, parsley, etc... (optional)  
4 garlic cloves, sliced or grated  
1 - 1 ½ litres tomato passata  
salt

First, make the tomato sauce. You can do this several days in advance if necessary. Heat the oil in a large pot. Fry the onions and herbs if you are using them. When golden, add the garlic and fry for one to two minutes until the garlic is just starting to change color. Add the tomato passata immediately. Use a cup or two of water to rinse the passata bottle clean and add this tomatoey water to the pan as well. Bring to the boil. Add salt to balance the flavor of the tomato. You will need around a tablespoon of salt, but add it a little at a time until it tastes right. Simmer over a very low heat with a lid on for 30mins to an hour.

Next, make the filling. Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl with your hands until evenly combined. Refrigerate until required. This mixture should not be prepared more than one day in advance as the ricotta will go off very quickly after you handle it.

On the day you are going to serve the pasta, stuff the pasta shells with filling, and place them in an oiled baking dish, open side up. If you are using the basil leaves, scatter them over the top, then scatter the parmesan over the top of that.

Preheat the oven to around 200degC. When the oven is hot, pour the tomato sauce over the pasta. Note, you can add the tomato sauce cold, or at the boil. If it's cold when you pour it over the stuffed shells, the cooking time will be about 30 mins longer. Cover with a lid (or foil) and bake for around 1 hour, or until the pasta is al dente. If you are in a hurry, crank the oven up to 220 or 240 degC and it will cook faster.

