



Melty Cheesy Zucchini Polenta Lasagna in a Mug

By Erin Fletter

Prep Time 15 / **Cook Time** 3 / **Serves** 1 - 1

Fun-Da-Mentals Kitchen Skills

chop: to cut something into small, rough pieces using a blade.

knife skills: Bear Claw (growl), Pinch, Plank, and Bridge (look out for trolls).

layer: to arrange foods in layers, such as sliced fruit in a pie or tart, or sliced potatoes in a potato gratin; or to build flavors by adding seasonings or foods that may be dissimilar but complement the overall dish.

microwave: to heat or cook food or liquid quickly in a microwave oven, which uses high-frequency electromagnetic waves to generate heat in the food's water molecules.

slice: to cut into thin pieces using a sawing motion with your knife.

Equipment

- Microwave
- Microwave-safe mug
- Potholder
- Cutting board + kid-safe knife (a butter knife works great)
- Liquid measuring cup
- Measuring spoons
- Small bowls for holding lasagna ingredients (4)
- Metal spoon
- Paper towel or dish towel
- Soap for cleaning hands

Ingredients

Melty Cheesy Zucchini Polenta Lasagna in a Mug

- 1/4 tube-shaped (for slicing) precooked polenta **** (for CORN ALLERGY sub wonton wrappers or zucchini strips—more info below)****
- 1/4 C ricotta or cottage cheese **** (for DAIRY ALLERGY sub 1/4 C silken tofu + 1 pinch of salt + 1 squeeze of lemon)****
- 1/4 C shredded mozzarella cheese **** (for DAIRY ALLERGY sub Daiya brand mozzarella-style cheese shreds)****
- 3 T marinara sauce (any pasta sauce will do!)
- 1/2 small zucchini (need 1/2 C diced)
- 1 pinch nutmeg, optional
- 1 pinch garlic powder, optional
- 1 T shredded or grated Parmesan cheese **** (Omit for DAIRY ALLERGY)****

Food Allergen Substitutions

Melty Cheesy Zucchini Polenta Lasagna in a Mug

Corn: For polenta, substitute wonton wrappers or strips of zucchini (pat them down with a paper towel and cut to fit the mug). If using zucchini strips, skip the zucchini in the filling!

Dairy: For 1/4 C ricotta, substitute 1/4 C silken tofu + 1 pinch of salt + 1 squeeze of lemon. Substitute Daiya brand dairy-free mozzarella-style cheese shreds in Lasagna. Omit Parmesan cheese.

Instructions

Melty Cheesy Zucchini Polenta Lasagna in a Mug

chop + slice

Chop **1/2 zucchini** into bite sized bits. You will need about 1/2 cup total. Slice **1/4 polenta**, or 4 rounds, from the tube. Each slice should be around 1/2 thick.

allergy note

If kid chefs are using wonton wrappers instead of polenta, they will simply substitute 1 wrapper for each slice of polenta. If kid chefs are using zucchini strips, have them use a vegetable peeler to peel long strips and fold them inside of their mug before layering the other ingredients.

measure + assembly line

Measure **1/4 cup ricotta**, **1/4 cup shredded mozzarella cheese**, **3 tablespoons marinara sauce**, and **1/2 cup chopped zucchini**, each into separate bowls, and set the bowls in line next to each other. Mix in to the ricotta **1 pinch of ground nutmeg** and **1 pinch of garlic powder**, if using.

spoon + layer

Start by spooning some marinara sauce in the bottom of your microwavable mug. Add a polenta round. Add a bit of chopped zucchini (skip the chopped zucchini if your kid chef is using zucchini strips instead of polenta). Add the ricotta and mozzarella. Repeat the layers: polenta, zucchini, ricotta, and mozzarella until you've filled your mug about 1/2 inch from the top, making the last layers shredded mozzarella cheese and a sprinkle of Parmesan.

cover + microwave

Cover the mug with a damp paper towel and microwave on high for 2 minutes. Let stand for 30 seconds and microwave on high for a final 30 seconds. Let cool slightly, carefully remove the mug with a potholder. "Mangiamo!" or "Let's eat" in Italian!

Featured Ingredient: Zucchini!

Hi! I'm Zucchini!

"I'm very fond of summer, aren't you? After all, I'm a summer squash! I have beautiful, tender green skin, so don't peel it off before cooking, or you'll lose some of my fiber and nutrients. I may be a small gourd, but you wouldn't like my taste as much if I got too big. You can do all sorts of things with me to fit your recipes: slicing, dicing, grating, and even making spaghetti-like noodles out of me using a vegetable peeler or a fancy device called a spiralizer!"

History

Zucchini (*Cucurbita pepo*) is a summer squash of the same family that includes cucumbers and melons. Summer squash is a squash that is picked when immature, while its peel is still tender. Like many other veggies we've seen, zucchini is technically a fruit, not a vegetable! Central and South American people have been eating zucchini for several thousand years. However, the zucchini we know today is an Italian variety of summer squash developed from those of native Central and South America. Christopher Columbus brought squash seeds to the Mediterranean region and Africa. The Native American word for zucchini is "skutasquash," which means "green thing eaten raw."

Anatomy & Etymology

Zucchini grow on vines just like cucumbers do.

Zucchini plants produce male and female flowers on the same plant, with the female flowers directly attached to the fruit and the male flowers attached to a long stem on the plant. Therefore, insects must pollinate the plants for the fruit to grow.

Zucchini can rapidly grow to several feet long, but the smaller ones taste sweeter.

The record for the longest zucchini is 8 feet 3.3 inches. The heaviest zucchini was 64 pounds 8 ounces! It's "zucchini" in the US, Canada, and a few other countries. The word is a plural of the Italian "zucchino" (masculine form—the feminine form, "zucchina" is preferred), which is a diminutive (smaller version) of "zucca" or "gourd."

In France, they say "courgette" (kooor-ZHET), which the British also use. It's a diminutive of the French "courage," which also means "gourd."

How to Pick, Buy, & Eat

Harvesting zucchini when they're between 6 to 8 inches long and 3 to 4 inches in diameter ensures they will be more tender and sweet.

A "bumper crop" of zucchini is an overload of zucchini that grows faster than a home gardener can cook and eat it!

When buying zucchini, choose firm and heavy ones for their size. In addition, fresh zucchini should have bright, glossy skin free of bruises or nicks. Zucchini stay fresh for up to a week when stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

Zucchini is very versatile, and you can use them in both savory and sweet dishes, like ratatouille and zucchini bread.

Fresh zucchini blossoms can be cooked and eaten raw. You can remove the pistils from the female flower blossoms and the stamens from male flower blossoms, but you don't have to. Both have flavor and are edible.

Nutrition

Potassium: helps reduce blood pressure and increase blood flow to and from our hearts.

Manganese: helps wounds heal and bones grow.

Antioxidants: help keep us healthy and healing faster when we're sick.

Fiber: helps us digest our food and absorb nutrients from our food.