

# Roasted Butternut Squash Lasagna – Comfort du Jour

The first day of fall feels like the perfect time to introduce you to one of my favorite homemade autumn-themed dishes—this butternut squash lasagna, which I first started making almost 10 years ago. This comforting casserole is layered, not with Italian seasonings or tomatoes or mozzarella, but with flavorful, seasonal vegetables, including onions and kale, two kinds of mushrooms and oven-roasted butternut squash. Nestled between the vegetable layers you'll find a lemon-scented ricotta, shredded fontina and a creamy, cheesy béchamel that is spiked with even more butternut squash. It is rich and satisfying, even without meat, and makes my taste buds very happy.

There is nothing complicated about this meal but, like any lasagna, it does take some time to pull together. My suggestion is to break it up into two days; prep the separate components ahead of time, so assembly and baking will be a snap on the second day. The other thing that is great about this dish is that you can customize it to increase the amounts of favorite ingredients and reduce any of the others that are not favorites. If you prefer more squash and less kale, just swap the amounts and change up the layering.

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 medium butternut squash, peeled and cubed\* (see notes)
- 1 large bunch curly kale, washed and stripped of heavy stems\*
- 12 oz. fresh mushrooms (I used a combination of cremini and shiitake)
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 14 oz. whole milk ricotta, strained of excess liquid
- 2 cloves fresh garlic, minced
- Zest of one lemon (organic is best)
- 1 large egg\*
- 4 Tbsp. butter (either salted or unsalted is fine)
- 4 Tbsp. all-purpose flour
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1 bulb **roasted garlic**
- 1 cup shredded gouda cheese\*
- A few shakes ground white pepper
- Freshly grated nutmeg (about 6 passes on a microplane)
- Enough lasagna noodles or sheets for three layers in your preferred pan\*
- 2 cups shredded fontina cheese\*
- About 1/3 cup grated **parm-romano blend**
- Salt and pepper, for seasoning your components or after each layer

## \*NOTES

Part of the squash will be cubed and roasted, and the rest will be simmered and mashed to be blended into the béchamel. I usually use the smooth neck part of the gourd for roasting, and the round part, which usually appears stringy after cleaning out the seeds, gets boiled and mashed to be added to the béchamel sauce. Keep this in mind as you prep the squash, so you have enough of both.

For this year's version of my recipe, I went heavier on the kale than usual. It would be perfectly fine to use half as much, and perhaps double the mushrooms or increase the butternut squash to make up some of the volume. Not

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in love with kale? Substitute Swiss chard or spinach, but be prepared to use a lot more because they are more tender with kale and cook down much smaller.

I chose gouda and fontina cheeses for this dish because of their creamy, meltable texture and rich, nutty flavors. Other cheeses would work well in this dish, including Havarti, gruyere, raclette, mild white cheddar or Monterey jack. I do not recommend mozzarella, which has too much “pull.”

Normally, I use a special square lasagna baking dish, but we are in the middle of planning for this remodel, and darned if I can find it! No worries, I pulled out a glass 9 x 13 and it worked great. The noodles do not have to be boiled first; I usually just moisten them for several minutes in hot water while I get everything else into place. If the noodles are layered next to ingredients with plenty of moisture, they will cook just fine.

If you work ahead, of course you want to refrigerate all the prepped ingredients. Most can be used straight from the fridge to assemble the lasagna.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### PREP THE SQUASH

Divide the squash so that you have uniform cubes from the neck of the squash, which you will toss in olive oil, salt and pepper, and then roast at 350 F until evenly browned, about 40 minutes. Allow it to cool on the pan before transferring to a separate bowl. Set aside until you’re ready to assemble the lasagna.

Add the remaining squash (from the bulb end) to a saucepan and cover with water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer until fork tender, about 30 minutes. Drain and set aside.

### PREP THE KALE

Strip the heavy stems from the washed kale leaves. Working in batches, pulse the kale about six times in a food processor, until kale is a finer texture but still ruffle-y. Sauté in olive oil until wilted and lightly browned on some of the edges. Just before cooking the last batch, sauté the chopped onion in the skillet first, then add kale. Season this final batch with salt and pepper and combine with previously cooked kale. Set aside.

### PREP THE MUSHROOMS

Clean and dry the mushrooms, then trim the stems and slice evenly. Brown the mushrooms, about one-third at a time, in olive oil. Season the last batch with salt, pepper and a few sprinkles of dried thyme leaves. Combine all mushrooms in a separate bowl and set aside.

### PREP THE RICOTTA MIXTURE

Drain the ricotta in a mesh strainer over a bowl. Stir occasionally to evenly strain the excess liquid from the cheese. Different brands will release varying amounts of liquid, but 30 minutes should do it. Discard the drained liquid. Add lemon zest, fresh garlic, a pinch of salt and black pepper to the ricotta. Stir in egg and set aside.

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## MAKE THE BÉCHAMEL

Remember, this is just a fancy French word that means “thickened cream sauce.” It’s easy to make! I prefer to make the béchamel just before assembling the lasagna, but if you are pressed for time, it’s fine to make it ahead and then re-heat in a pot until it is a smooth, pourable consistency. There are several steps for this component, and several flavorful add-ins, including some of the mashed butternut squash.

Heat a large sauce pot over medium heat. Add butter until melted. Whisk in flour and cook until it is bubbly, lightly browned and fragrantly nutty. Add the milk, about half at a time, whisking the first amount until smooth before adding the rest. Continue to cook, stirring frequently, until the sauce is thickened and bubbly. Stir in nutmeg and white pepper. Whisk in about 2/3 cup of the mashed butternut squash and cook until heated through. Stir in shredded gouda, whisking until melted. Use an immersion blender, if you have one, to blend the bechamel sauce to a super-smooth consistency. This is not an essential step, but I love the silky texture that is achieved with the blender. Keep the sauce warm enough to be pourable and spreadable for assembling the lasagna. If you make it ahead, warm it on the stove until it is a smooth, pourable consistency.

## ASSEMBLE AND BAKE

1. Ladle about 1/2 cup of the butternut-bechamel sauce into the bottom of a 9 x 13 glass baking dish. Then, layer the individual components as follows:
2. Lasagna noodles (moistened but not cooked), 1/3 ricotta mixture, 1/2 kale mixture, 1/3 shredded cheese, 1/3 of béchamel
3. Lasagna noodles (press down to compress first layers), 1/3 ricotta mixture, entire amount of roasted squash, 1/3 shredded cheese
4. Lasagna noodles (press to compress), remaining ricotta mixture, remaining kale and entire amount of mushrooms, remaining bechamel and shredded cheese, parm-romano blend cheese on top

Cover casserole with plastic wrap or foil and allow it to rest for at least 30 minutes, to give the noodles time to absorb some of the moisture from the other ingredients. Preheat oven to 350°F, with rack in center position.

Remove wrap or foil and bake lasagna about 45 minutes, or until layers are bubbly throughout and cheese on top is browned in several places.

Let the lasagna rest about 10 minutes before cutting and serving. Leftovers reheat nicely in the microwave.