

Meatballs in Tomato Sauce – Paradicsomos Húsgombóc

Can't go wrong with this crowd pleaser be it a family meal, weekday dinner. The ground meat is mixed with rice and binded with an egg like in quite a few of other Hungarian dishes. The tomato sauce could be made many different ways, from using concentrated tomato puree with water, passata, or tins of chopped tomatoes. The sauce is usually thickened with a bit of roux made with oil and flour at the end. It is very nice served with potatoes.

Ingredients – for 4 people

For the meatballs:

- 500g (1.1lb) minced/ground meat, I used beef could be made with pork or turkey too
- 1 medium white onion very finely chopped or grated
- 1-2 cloves of garlic finely chopped
- 250ml (1 cup) uncooked white rice
- 1 egg
- ½ tsp dried basil
- ½ tsp dried marjoram
- salt, pepper

For the tomato sauce:

- 3 x 400g tins of chopped tomatoes
- 125ml (½ cup) water
- 1 tbsp sugar or sweetener
- salt to taste
- celery stalk (optional)
- 3-4 tbsp sunflower or vegetable oil
- 1 tsp of flour

How to make

1. Saute the onion and garlic on a little oil, set aside
2. Part cook the rice, should be al dente. Rinse with cold water or let it cool, then add to the minced meat.
3. Puree the chopped tomato in a blender or with a hand mixer, add the water, sprinkle in the salt and sugar.
4. Combine the meat and rice mixture with the sauteed onion, garlic, the egg and the herbs, seasoning, no need to overmix, it could make the meatballs a bit dense-textured and heavy.
5. Form about golf ball size meatballs between the palms of your hands – I got 8 from this amount.
6. Place the meatballs in the tomato sauce in a larger pan and cook on a moderate/slow heat till the meatballs cook through, about 30 minutes. A celery stalk or two cooked in the tomato sauce gives a pleasant subtle dimension to the taste and could be discarded when the dish is ready. (If the tomato sauce not covering all of the dumplings you could cook them in batches, or even separately in some lightly salted water and place them in the tomato sauce when both ready.)

7. Once the meatballs are cooked, check if the tomato sauce needs more salt or sugar. If it could do with a bit of thickening, carefully lift out the meatballs and in a separate pan heat the 3-4 tablespoons of oil and fry the teaspoon of flour in it, add the frying flour to the bubbling hot tomato sauce and stir to prevent lumps forming. Bring to the boil for a few seconds while still stirring then reduce the heat and place the meatballs back in the sauce.
8. Serve with boiled or mashed potatoes.