



### **Italian Layered Zucchini Noodle Casserole**

*Delicious cousin to a healthy Lasagna with plant based hot sausage*

#### **Soften Zucchini Noodles**

2 medium large zucchinis, thinly sliced lengthwise strips (5 cups)

1/4 teaspoon sea salt

#### **Directions:**

1. Cut zucchini strips into shorter strips for easier slicing. Place zucchini slices in large microwave safe bowl; toss with salt; cover loosely.
2. Microwave on high power for 4 to 5 minutes until water releases from zucchini and zucchini are bright green; drain off water. When cool enough to handle, squeeze excess water from zucchini using paper towels. Set zucchini aside.

#### **Plant Based Sausage Filling:**

7 ounces Spicy Plant Based Sausage (2 links)

1 cup chopped onions

4 ounces chopped mixed mushrooms

1 egg, whisked lightly

1/2 cup fresh basil leaves, torn

1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

2 Tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

**Directions:**

1. In a large hot skillet, cook sausage links over medium to medium/high heat, turning to brown all sides, for about 10 minutes or tests 165 degrees F. Remove to paper lined plate to drain excess oil. When able to handle, chop into bite size pieces; set aside.
2. Add onion to pan drippings, sauté for about 2 minutes; add mushrooms; stir; cover; cook covered for 5 minutes or lightly browned. Place in large bowl, toss with cooked chopped “sausage” links. Set aside to cool.
3. Into the cooled “sausage filling,” stir egg, torn basil, 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese and 2 Tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese, Set aside.

**Layer Ingredients in 8-Inch square baking dish; preheat oven to 425 degrees F.**

1-1/4 cups tomato sauce, divided

2/3 cup shredded Mozzarella cheese

2 Tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

Garnish: Fresh basil sprigs

**Directions:**

4. Spoon 1/2 cup tomato sauce over the bottom of overproof 8-inch square baking dish. Layer a third of the zucchini strips over the sauce; sprinkle with 1 cup “sausage” filling; dot and lightly spread with 2 Tablespoons of tomato sauce.
5. Repeat layering twice, using zucchini strips, “sausage” filling, and tomato sauce. Spread 1/2 cup tomato sauce over the top layer. Sprinkle 2/3 cup shredded mozzarella and 2 Tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese over the entire top.
6. Bake in preheated 425-degree F oven for 20 minutes or until hot and cheese melts. Remove from oven; cool about 10 to 15 minutes for easier serving.
7. Cut into 4 large squares, making sure to cut through the zucchini slices. To Serve: use 2 turner tools, place one square on each serving plate. Garnish each plate with a fresh basil sprig. Serves: 4

**Cook’s Note:** If you want to make this ahead of time; layer it in the pan; cover; refrigerate. Let dish come to room temperature before baking.

**About the Recipe:** Preparing this plant-based Italian hot sausage dish is a great way to use those extra zucchini veggies, which appear during the summer months. Use a vegetable peeler or mandolin to quickly slice the zucchini into uniform thin strips. It’s hard to believe that this is a vegetarian entrée. It’s filled with all the flavors everyone loves.