

- Prep Time: 10 minutes
- Cook Time: 20 minutes
- Total Time: 30 minutes
- Yield: 4 generous servings
- Cooking Method: Stovetop Skillet
- Difficulty: Easy

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Cooking Intensities & Equipment

Understanding heat management is key to getting the best texture out of your ingredients without burning the garlic or curdling the cream sauce.

- Searing/Browning Heat: Medium-High (Intensity: 7/10) — Used for browning the ground beef to develop a deep, savory crust and render out excess fat.
- Aromatic Sauté Heat: Medium (Intensity: 5/10) — Used for softening the onions and gently frying the garlic to release essential oils without scorching.
- Simmer & Sauce Heat: Low to Medium-Low (Intensity: 2/10 to 3/10) — Used to gently melt the cream cheese, reduce the heavy cream, and melt the final layer of cheese into a smooth, glossy sauce.

Recommended Equipment

- Large 12-inch cast-iron skillet or heavy-bottomed non-stick skillet
- Wooden spoon or heat-safe spatula
- Measuring cups and spoons

- Box grater (for fresh cheese melting)

Ingredients Checklist

The Meat & Base

- 1.5 lbs (680g) Ground Beef (80/20 lean-to-fat ratio recommended for flavor, or 90/10 for a leaner option)
- 1 tablespoon Olive Oil or Unsalted Butter (for initial sautéing)
- 1 small Yellow Onion, finely diced
- 5 cloves Garlic, minced or finely crushed

Seasonings & Aromatics

- 1 teaspoon Italian Seasoning (or a mixture of dried oregano, basil, and thyme)
- 1/2 teaspoon Smoked Paprika (adds color and subtle depth)
- 1/2 teaspoon Onion Powder
- 1/2 teaspoon Red Pepper Flakes (optional, for a subtle warmth)

- 1 teaspoon Salt (adjust to taste)
- 1/2 teaspoon Freshly Cracked Black Pepper

The Creamy Cheese Sauce

- 4 oz (115g) Cream Cheese, softened at room temperature and cut into cubes
- 1/2 cup Heavy Cream (or double cream)
- 1/2 cup Beef Broth (low-sodium preferred)
- 1 cup Shredded Mozzarella Cheese (divided)
- 1/2 cup Freshly Grated Parmesan Cheese

The Greens

- 5 oz (140g) Fresh Baby Spinach, thoroughly washed and dried

Step-by-Step Cooking Instructions

Step 1: Brown the Beef

1. Place your skillet over Medium-High heat (Intensity: 7/10) and add the olive oil or butter.
2. Once the skillet is hot, add the ground beef. Use your wooden spoon to break the meat apart into smaller crumbled pieces.
3. Cook for 6 to 8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the beef is fully browned and no pink remains.
4. *Optional step:* If there is an excessive amount of rendered fat, drain all but 1 tablespoon of grease from the skillet to keep the final sauce rich rather than oily.

Step 2: Build the Aromatic Flavor Base

1. Reduce the heat down to Medium (Intensity: 5/10).
2. Push the browned beef to the outer edges of the skillet, creating an open well in the center.
3. Add the diced yellow onion to the center and cook for 2 to 3 minutes until translucent and soft.
4. Stir in the minced garlic, Italian seasoning, smoked paprika, onion powder, red pepper flakes, salt, and black pepper.

5. Mix the aromatics into the beef thoroughly and cook for another 60 seconds until the garlic is fragrant.

Step 3: Create the Creamy Sauce

1. Reduce the heat to Medium-Low (Intensity: 3/10).
2. Pour in the beef broth and heavy cream, scraping up any delicious brown bits stuck to the bottom of the skillet (this is pure flavor!).
3. Add the softened cream cheese cubes into the liquid.
4. Stir continuously for 3 to 4 minutes as the cream cheese slowly melts and blends with the liquid into a smooth, cohesive, bubbling cream base.

Step 4: Wilt the Spinach

1. Add the fresh baby spinach to the skillet in two batches. It will look like a lot at first, but it wilts down rapidly.
2. Stir the spinach into the warm beef and cream sauce over Low heat (Intensity: 2/10).
3. Cook for about 2 minutes, just until the leaves are fully wilted and incorporated into the sauce.

Step 5: Melt the Cheese & Serve

1. Turn off the heat completely.
2. Stir in the grated Parmesan cheese and half (1/2 cup) of the shredded Mozzarella cheese until completely melted into the meat mixture.
3. Sprinkle the remaining half (1/2 cup) of Mozzarella evenly over the top of the skillet.
4. Cover the skillet with a lid or foil for 2 to 3 minutes to allow the residual heat to melt the top cheese layer into a bubbly, stretchy blanket.
5. Garnish with additional black pepper or fresh parsley, and serve hot directly from the skillet!

Chef's Tips for Success

- Use Softened Cream Cheese: Cold cream cheese from the fridge takes much longer to melt and can leave tiny lumps in your sauce. Set it on the counter 30 minutes prior to cooking.
- Grate Your Own Cheese: Pre-shredded cheeses are coated with anti-caking agents like potato starch, which can cause creamy sauces to feel gritty. Grating fresh block cheese produces the smoothest melt.
- Adjust Sauce Thickness: If you prefer a thinner sauce, stir in an extra 2–3 tablespoons of

beef broth. If you want a thicker sauce, let it simmer gently over low heat for an extra 2 minutes before adding the final cheese layer.

Recipe Variations & Substitutions

- **Protein Swap:** Swap the ground beef for ground turkey, ground chicken, or mild Italian sausage for a different flavor profile.
- **Extra Veggies:** Boost the veggie content by adding sliced button mushrooms, diced bell peppers, or riced cauliflower during Step 2.
- **Spicy Kick:** Double the red pepper flakes and use Pepper Jack cheese in place of Mozzarella for a spicy garlic skillet.

Complete Nutritional Information

The following nutrition estimate is calculated per serving based on 4 total servings.

Nutritional Metric	Amount Per Serving
Calories	590 kcal
Total Fat	45 g
— Saturated Fat	22 g
— Trans Fat	1.5 g
Cholesterol	155 mg
Sodium	890 mg
Total Carbohydrates	6 g
— Dietary Fiber	1.5 g
— Total Sugars	2.5 g

Nutritional Metric	Amount Per Serving
Net Carbohydrates	4.5 g
Protein	40 g
Vitamin D	0.4 mcg
Calcium	320 mg
Iron	3.8 mg
Potassium	580 mg