

- Prep Time: 25 minutes
- Salt & Drain Time (Zucchini): 20 minutes
- Cook Time: 45 minutes
- Resting Time: 15 minutes
- Total Time: 1 hour 45 minutes
- Servings: 8 slices
- Recipe Intensity Level: Medium (Requires simple knife skill or mandoline handling, plus precise moisture extraction for optimal texture)

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Equipment Needed

- Mandoline slicer or sharp chef's knife
- Large rimmed baking sheet
- Paper towels or clean kitchen towels
- Large skillet or Dutch oven
- 9×13-inch ceramic or glass baking dish
- Medium mixing bowl
- Cheese grater

Ingredients

For the Zucchini Noodle Layers

- 4 medium-to-large zucchini (about 2.5 to 3 lbs total)
- 1 tsp coarse salt (for drawing out moisture)

For the Garlic & Herb Meat Sauce

- 1.5 lbs ground meat (100% lean beef, ground turkey, or a 50/50 mix of beef and mild Italian sausage)
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely diced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 24 oz (1 jar) low-sugar marinara sauce or crushed plum tomatoes
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tsp dried Italian seasoning

- 1/2 tsp crushed red pepper flakes (optional, for mild heat)
- 1/2 tsp fine sea salt
- 1/4 tsp freshly cracked black pepper

For the Creamy Cheese Filling & Topping

- 15 oz whole milk ricotta cheese (drained of excess whey)
- 1 large egg
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese, divided
- 2.5 cups shredded low-moisture mozzarella cheese, divided
- 1/4 tsp ground nutmeg (optional, for classic depth)

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Slice and Salt the Zucchini

1. Trim the ends off the 4 zucchini. Using a mandoline slicer set to 1/4-inch thickness (or a steady chef's knife), slice the zucchini lengthwise into long, uniform planks.
2. Line a large baking sheet with paper towels. Arrange the zucchini slices in a single layer across the paper towels.
3. Sprinkle the 1 tsp coarse salt evenly over both sides of the slices. Let them sit at room temperature for 20 minutes. The salt will draw out sweat and excess water.
4. After 20 minutes, press down firmly on the top of the zucchini planks with clean paper towels to absorb all extracted moisture.

Step 2: Prepare the Meat Sauce

1. Place a large skillet over medium-high heat and add 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil.
2. Add the diced yellow onion and sauté for 3 to 4 minutes until translucent and soft.
3. Stir in the minced garlic and cook for 1 minute until fragrant.
4. Add the ground meat, breaking it up with a wooden spoon. Cook for 6 to 8 minutes until completely browned. Drain off any excess rendered fat if necessary.
5. Reduce heat to medium. Stir in the tomato paste, dried Italian seasoning, crushed red

pepper, sea salt, and black pepper. Cook for 2 minutes to toast the spices.

6. Pour in the marinara sauce, stir thoroughly, and bring to a low simmer. Turn heat to low and let the sauce cook uncovered for 10 minutes to thicken. Remove from heat and allow to cool slightly.

Step 3: Mix the Cheese Layer

1. In a medium mixing bowl, combine the ricotta cheese, 1 large egg, fresh chopped parsley, 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese, 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella, and nutmeg.
2. Whisk or stir with a fork until smooth and fully incorporated.

Step 4: Assemble the Lasagna

1. Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C). Lightly grease a 9×13-inch baking dish with non-stick spray or olive oil.
2. Bottom Layer: Spread 1/2 cup of the meat sauce across the bottom of the dish to prevent sticking.
3. Zucchini Planks: Lay down a single layer of zucchini slices, slightly overlapping the edges to form a continuous base.
4. Cheese Filling: Dollop half of the ricotta cheese mixture over the zucchini and gently smooth it out using the back of a spoon.

5. Meat Sauce: Spread half of the remaining meat sauce evenly over the ricotta layer.
6. Mozzarella: Sprinkle 3/4 cup of shredded mozzarella over the meat sauce.
7. Repeat Layers: Add a second layer of zucchini planks, followed by the remaining ricotta mixture, the remaining meat sauce, and another 3/4 cup of mozzarella.
8. Top Layer: Arrange the final layer of zucchini planks across the top. Cover evenly with the remaining 1 cup of mozzarella cheese and the remaining 1/4 cup of grated Parmesan.

Step 5: Bake to Golden Perfection

1. Cover the baking dish loosely with aluminum foil (tent it slightly so the cheese doesn't stick to the foil).
2. Bake at 375°F (190°C) for 30 minutes.
3. Carefully remove the aluminum foil and bake uncovered for an additional 15 minutes, or until the cheese is bubbly and lightly browned on top.
4. *(Optional)* Turn the oven to broil on High for 2 minutes at the end for an extra crispy, browned cheese crust. Watch closely to prevent burning.

Step 6: Rest and Serve

1. Remove the dish from the oven. Allow the lasagna to rest uncovered for 15 to 20 minutes before slicing. This resting step is crucial as it allows the natural juices to settle, giving you clean, neat slices that hold their shape.
2. Garnish with additional fresh chopped basil or parsley before serving.

Kitchen Pro-Tips for Perfect Zucchini Lasagna

- **Avoid Watery Lasagna:** Zucchini is over 90% water. Beyond salting, you can lightly grill or bake the plain zucchini slices at 375°F for 8–10 minutes prior to assembly to ensure maximum moisture removal.
- **Cheese Matters:** Use low-moisture, block-shredded mozzarella rather than fresh mozzarella balls stored in liquid. Fresh mozzarella releases too much moisture during baking.
- **Make-Ahead Friendly:** Assemble the lasagna up to 24 hours in advance, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and store in the refrigerator. When ready to bake, replace plastic wrap with foil and add 10 extra minutes to the initial covered bake time.

Storage & Meal Prep

- **Refrigerator:** Store leftovers in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 4 days. Reheat individual portions in the microwave or in an oven at 350°F until warmed

through.

- Freezing: While cooked zucchini can soften upon thawing, you can freeze baked slices in freezer-safe containers for up to 2 months. Thaw in the refrigerator overnight before reheating.

Nutritional Information

(Calculated per serving based on 8 equal portions using lean ground beef and low-moisture whole-milk cheese)

Nutrient	Amount Per Serving
Calories	385 kcal
Total Fat	22 g
<i>Saturated Fat</i>	10 g
<i>Trans Fat</i>	0.5 g
Cholesterol	105 mg
Sodium	780 mg
Total Carbohydrates	11 g
<i>Dietary Fiber</i>	3 g
<i>Net Carbohydrates</i>	8 g
<i>Sugars</i>	6 g
Protein	34 g
Calcium	380 mg
Iron	2.8 mg
Potassium	620 mg