

cheesy shells alla sausage vodka

BY CAROLINE CHAMBERS

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large onion, finely diced
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 1 tablespoon fresh rosemary, minced (or 1 teaspoon dried rosemary)
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 pound mild Italian sausage
- 1/2 cup vodka
- 1 (28 ounce) cans whole peeled tomatoes
- 1 (14 ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- Kosher salt
- Red pepper flakes
- 12 ounces jumbo shells
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 1/2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup basil leaves, thinly sliced

Warm **2 tablespoons of olive oil** in a large ovenproof heavy bottomed pan or pot (such as a Dutch oven, braiser, or any stainless steel pot) over medium-high heat. Sauté **1 large, finely diced onion** until translucent, then add in **6 minced garlic cloves, the zest of 1 lemon, 1 tablespoon minced rosemary, and 2 teaspoons dried oregano** and cook for 1 more minute.

Add **1 pound of Italian sausage meat** and cook until no longer pink, breaking it up with a spoon into tiny crumbles - we don't want any big chunks!

Deglaze the pan with **1/2 cup vodka** (yes - vodka! don't worry, your pasta isn't going to taste like vodka!) for about 1 minute. What the hell does deglaze mean? Basically, just pour in the vodka and use that liquid to scrape the bottom of the pot and get any bits that are stuck to the pan unstuck - aka, "deglazed". It'll sizzle and a lot of the vodka will "burn off" aka evaporate. The booziness evaporates quickly (alcohol evaporates faster than water!), so yes, you can serve this to your kids.

Stir in **one 28-ounce can of whole peeled tomatoes** and **one 14-ounce can tomato sauce**, crushing each tomato with your hands before you add it to the pot. Add **1/2 cup heavy cream, 1 tablespoon sugar** and simmer the sauce over medium heat until thickened and no longer watery, about 30 minutes.

Season to taste with **salt** and **red pepper flakes (if desired)**. I can't tell ya exactly how much salt to use because that'll depend on what sausage and tomatoes you use! But I bet it'll be about 1 teaspoon. Keep tasting and seasoning until it's perfect.

Remove sauce from heat.

Meanwhile, cook **12 ounces of jumbo shells** until al dente. Quickly drain in a colander, but throw it into the pasta sauce before *all* of the pasta water drains off of it. Never, ever, ever rinse this (or any!) pasta. The starch on the noodles helps thicken the sauce and make it silky, and helps the sauce stick to the noodles!

Stir the shells and **1/2 cup grated Parmesan** into the sauce, taking care to peel apart any shells that have gotten stuck together, and to fill each shell with sauce. Smooth the pasta into an even layer, then sprinkle **1 1/2 cups mozzarella cheese** over top.

Now we need to melt that cheese, so cover the pot with a lid, and place the pot over medium-low heat. Cook for 5 to 10 minutes, until the cheese is melted.

Serve with more **parm** and **fresh basil**.