



TRAEGER TALK

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LASAGNA AN ITALIAN FEAST

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound Sweet Italian Sausage
- 1 pound Ground Beef
- 21 Lasagna Noodles
- 1 Large Onion, diced
- 2 Bell Peppers, diced (1 green, 1 red)
- 6 cloves Garlic, chopped
- 1 tbsp Garlic Powder
- 28 oz can Diced Tomatoes
- 15oz Tomato Sauce
- 8 oz Tomato Paste
- 24 oz Cottage Cheese
- 12 slices Provolone Cheese
- 12 slices Mozzarella Cheese
- ¼ cup Parmesan/Romano Cheese
- 4 tbsp Fennel, cracked
- 4 tbsp Basil, dried
- 1 tbsp Oregano
- 1 tsp Red Pepper Flakes
- 2 tbsp Olive Oil
- 1 tbsp Salt, plus lots more for the pasta water
- 1 tbsp Pepper

Lasagna is a favorite for Sunday evening dinners. Delicious and festive, it is a celebration of flavor and texture, color and family. There is significant time that has to be invested, but there is a silver lining; it is easily frozen in family size or individual portions for later meals with little to no work involved. My personal opinion is that lasagna tastes even better after reheating. Lasagna doesn't have to be complicated to make. You can use pasta sauce from a jar and store bought Italian sausage with great results. Or, you can add your own personal touch by making your own sauce and spicing your own meats.

For smoke lovers, the Traeger adds another dimension to the flavor. The smoke flavor won't be strong, as cooking in a pan doesn't expose much surface to the smoke and the baking temperature is high enough that the Traeger isn't producing strong flavored smoke. To bring more smoke flavor into the dish, we can smoke some of the ingredients of the sauce before incorporating them into the whole, which is what I did with this recipe.

I used half sweet Italian pork sausage and half ground beef for the meats. After mixing ground beef with sausage (two tablespoons cracked fennel, two tablespoons dried basil, one tablespoon garlic granules, one tablespoon dried oregano, one teaspoon salt and one teaspoon pepper) spices, I spread both meats out in bite-sized irregular chunks on a jelly roll pan prepped with two tablespoons of olive oil. The chunks were made irregular to expose the maximum amount of surface area to the smoke. I also smoked the diced bell peppers, onion, and chopped garlic. I smoked the meat and vegetables for an hour at 180°F, then turned the grill up to 425°F for 15 minutes to brown and sear.



The smoked meat and veggies were then added to the pot with the tomatoes, tomato paste, and tomato sauce. I added the rest of the spices and simmered the sauce for an hour before building the lasagna. The sausage chunks stuck themselves together in the grill and had to be broken apart in the pot.

The noodles should be cooked according to label instructions to al dente firmness. My roaster pan needed seven noodles for each layer, for a total of 21 noodles. I cooked a few extra to make sure I had enough in case they didn't expand as much as expected, but 21 turned out just right.

A purist might insist that the only acceptable soft cheese is ricotta. However, cottage cheese is a popular choice also. In any case, the stores in the area were out of ricotta, so this batch has cottage cheese. I also used provolone, mozzarella, and blended Parmesan/Romano.

Spread a layer of sauce on the bottom of the pan, then noodles, then sauce, cheese, and noodles. There were 11 layers in all: Sauce, noodles, sauce, provolone cheese, noodles, sauce, cottage cheese, noodles, sauce, mozzarella cheese, and Parmesan/Romano cheese garnish.

The whole roaster went back into the Traeger for 45 minutes at 425°F. You will want to check after 30 minutes and pull it out when the cheese on top is lightly toasted. Let the pan sit for a half hour before serving. This will allow the noodles to absorb any loose liquid and for the cheese to firm up.

Even with the extra smoke treatment, the smoke flavor was subtle. I used Pecan pellets, which have good smoke flavor and have been the most popular flavor in our tasting events, the #greattraegerpelletshootout.



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