

Grandma's Perfect Meatballs



From Josephine's Petite Cucina

Today is January 3, 2015. It would have been Josephine's 84th birthday. It's the perfect day to share the story of when Mom taught her 13-year old grandson, Michael, to make her famous meatballs from scratch.

It's a memory I'll never forget and a timeless cooking lesson from an authentic Italian cook.



The Meatball Story –

There are some days since my Mom passed away in 2011 when I miss her terribly. January 3rd is one of them as it is her birthday. I think about when I was a little girl, the little birthday parties on our front porch, and the sugary cakes she made from scratch. When I was only three or four year's old, I loved cherry cake with pink cherry icing. It was a sugar-fest with my favorite colors. Who *wouldn't* love it?



Through the years, there were many icing-covered memories, but my fondest memory of Mom happened on December 31, 2010 – just four years ago. It was New Year's Eve and Mom was exhausted from her battle with chemotherapy and pancreatic cancer. My husband and I decided to make dinner that night for her and to also cook for New Year's Day, when my sister and brother-in-law would join us.

Though we wanted Mom to rest, something came over her. Maybe it was her faith in God or her love of family. It was like that scene from [Moonstruck](#) when Johnny Cammereri tells Loretta Castorini about his trip to Italy and his Mom suddenly rising from her sickbed to cook for the family.

In our case, Josephine decided it was time to show her only grandson how to make meatballs from scratch. He absolutely loved her meatballs and she wasn't going to let a little terminal illness stop her from sharing the family recipe that's lasted more than one lifetime.

I'll never forget Mom showing Michael how to create the perfect meatball consistency and how to roll the meatballs by hand. Mom's kitchen was immaculate. So was her knack for meatballs.

She looked at me, hand in bowl, and said, *See, Judy. My hands are all clean because I rolled them right. Michael's aren't so you'll have to work with him when I'm gone.*

Michael has become quite stubborn about Grandma's Meatballs. He believes in using the exact ingredients exactly as she taught him. He continues to make meatballs today and isn't afraid to tell us when we don't get it right. It's an authentic recipe and they just may be the greatest Italian meatballs in the world.

The Ingredients –

1.5 lbs. – Hamburger (90% lean is optimal)
2-4 tbsp. Grated Cheese (Mom used a 50/50
Parmesan / Romano cheese mix)
2 Eggs
6 – 8 pieces White or White Italian Bread –
squeezed in water but not too soggy
 $\frac{1}{4}$ Green pepper chopped in tiny pieces
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp Salt
Sprinkle of Black Pepper
2 small cloves – Garlic (chopped small)
1 tbsp. Dried Basil (or fresh Basil chopped fine)



Creating the Perfect Meatball –

The key to meatballs isn't just the taste – it's the consistency.

Don't worry if they're not perfect the first time – it's trial and error until you get it exactly right!

Place raw hamburger and all the other ingredients in a mixing bowl that's big enough for you to put your hands in. Knead the meatballs to consistency. Think about rolling them smooth and you'll get the right texture. If you palm the first raw meatball and it seems too mushy, add another slice of bread.

Roll each meatball in the palm of your hand into medium sized balls. Take your time rolling so that they are smooth and firm. (If the palm of your hand is nearly 'clean' after you've rolled them and the meatball doesn't stick to your hand, you've done it right).



Mom used to fry hers in quite a bit of good olive oil until they were browned. She liked browning on each side to make the sauce taste good. My husband and I bake ours in the oven on a broiler tray. You might sacrifice a little flavor but they're still perfect. Bake at 400 degrees for 20-25 minutes, turning them every 10 minutes to ensure they are brown on each side. Serve with your favorite sauce.

Buon Appetito!