

## Baked Ziti with Four Cheeses

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The winter doldrums are well and truly here. The lovely first snowfall and wonder and excitement of Christmas are gone. The first seed catalogs are yet to arrive. What is a body to do? I am cold from my nose to my toes and deep in my soul. I cannot bear to count another gram of fat or carb. It is really easy to solve this dilemma. Into the kitchen we go to whip up a dish that will warm you from the inside out. A dish to share with family and friends and fill the house with wonderful aromas. Simply put, we all need some comfort food right now. Be warned, do not attempt this if you are dieting because you will come back for seconds!

Baked pasta dishes have a long history in Italian cooking, some complicated and time consuming and others simple and rustic. This recipe falls into the latter category. It should take no more than half an hour to put together and another half hour to finish itself off in the oven. Add a salad and some hearty red wine and you will have a wonderful meal fit to serve anyone deserving your table. Some may say this is an Italian version of Mac and Cheese. I say it is much more. Four cheeses combined with good tomato sauce meld together for a much more sophisticated and layered taste than the American cousin.

While this recipe calls for Ziti you may substitute any small tubular pasta such as penne or penne rigate. Do not use elbow macaroni. Please use the best cheeses you can find, it is well worth the price in final taste.

### **Baked Ziti with Four Cheeses**

Serves six

- 1 lb. Ziti
- ¾ lb. Whole milk Ricotta
- ¼ lb. Italian Fontina, coarsely grated
- ¼ lb. Whole milk Mozzarella, coarsely grated
- ¼ cup finely grated Parmesan
- 1 qt. Tomato sauce (home made is really the best, see Recipe #10 in our library or use your favorite)
- 2 cups Bechamel sauce

*Make the Bechamel:*

- 2 cups whole milk
- ¼ lb. Butter
- 4 Tblsp. flour
- 1 tsp. Salt

Melt the butter in a medium saucepan – add flour and stir to blend. You are aiming for a white roux, so cook the butter/flour mixture only 2 minutes. Add the cold milk all at once and whisk to blend. Add salt. Bring to a simmer, stirring constantly until thickened. You can make this while the pasta is cooking.

*Assemble the dish:*

Butter a glass casserole dish, approximately 13x10, and set aside. Cook the ziti in a large quantity of boiling salted water according to package directions or until it is done to your liking (al dente, hopefully). While the pasta is cooking, warm the tomato sauce and put it into a bowl large enough to hold all ingredients. When the pasta is cooked, drain well, add to the tomato sauce, add Bechamel, then add all the cheeses except Parmesan and mix vigorously until well combined. Pour into the buttered casserole, top with Parmesan, and bake 30-35 minutes until bubbly. Let sit five minutes before serving.

**Altitude adjustment:** None.