



Find piquillo peppers at the supermarket. MICHELLE DUDASH

Cocktail meatballs get a spicy Spanish kick

Fried or boiled? That is the question. Pan-frying meatballs yields a deliciously caramelized crust, but the meatballs are likely to be in the shape of a pyramid. A simmered meatball, however, retains its shape as long as the underside doesn't fully rest on the bottom of the pan. Simmering also uses less oil, resulting in fewer calories and fat grams. That's why I prefer simmering.

I also prefer Spanish-style meatballs slathered in a sweet pepper sauce. Find bottled piquillo peppers in the international-food section of most grocery stores.

Michelle Dudash of Scottsdale is a registered dietitian and Le Cordon Bleu-trained chef. Find a link to her blog, Dudash's Healthy Dish, at azcvoices.com.



MICHELLE DUDASH
HEALTHY DISH

Spanish Cocktail Meatballs With Piquillo Pepper Tomato Sauce

From Michelle Dudash

Sauce

- 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 jarred roasted piquillo or red bell peppers, cut into thin strips
- ¼ cup thinly sliced onion
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- ¼ cup white wine
- 1 can (28-ounce) whole tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon sweet or smoked paprika
- 1 pinch salt

Meatballs

- 1 pound lean ground chicken
- ¼ cup grated onion
- ¼ cup whole-wheat bread crumbs
- 1 egg
- 2 teaspoons sweet or smoked paprika
- 2 teaspoons red wine vinegar
- ¼ teaspoon dried thyme
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup chopped Italian flat-leaf parsley

Heat a large skillet or saute pan on medium-low and add oil. Add peppers, onion, garlic and pepper flakes and cook gently until tender, reducing heat as vegetables shrink, about 10 minutes. Add wine to deglaze the pan, scraping up any brown bits from the sides and bottom of pan. Add tomatoes, paprika and salt; bring to a simmer.

Meanwhile, in a large bowl, combine chicken, onion, bread crumbs, egg, paprika, vinegar, thyme, pepper and salt. Shape heaping tablespoons of meat mixture with hands or use a small ice-cream scoop, and drop each meatball into the simmering sauce. As meatballs turn a lighter color underneath and are cooked on one side, gently rotate them with a spoon to cook all sides and to cook through.

Garnish meatballs with chopped parsley and serve with toothpicks.

Makes 7 servings.

Approximate values per serving: 158 calories, 7 g total fat (2 g saturated fat, 0 trans fat), 328 mg sodium, 75 mg cholesterol, 10 g total carbohydrate (2 g fiber), 13 g protein.