



NEAPOLITAN MEATBALLS WITH RAGÙ

6-8 SERVINGS

50 minutes

In Naples, meatballs are generously sized, and their texture is ultra-tender from a high ratio of bread to meat. For our version, we opted to use Japanese panko breadcrumbs. Panko, which has a neutral flavor and a light and fluffy but coarse texture, greatly streamlines the meatball-making process, eliminating the need to remove the crusts from fresh bread, cut and measure, soak in water, then squeeze out excess moisture. Panko only needs to be moistened with water and it's ready to use. Neapolitans serve their meatballs with a basic tomato sauce they refer to as "ragù." We use pecorino liberally in this recipe: a chunk simmered in the sauce, as well as grated both in and over the meatballs. Though not traditional, pasta is a fine accompaniment. Or offer warm, crusty bread alongside.

Don't be shy about mixing the panko-meat mixture with your hands. It takes a few minutes to work the mixture together until homogeneous. Your hands are the best tools for this. Don't bake the meatballs without first allowing them to chill for 15 to 20 minutes; this helps them hold their shape. And after baking, make sure to let the meatballs rest for about 10 minutes before adding them to the sauce; if the timing is off and the sauce is ready before the meatballs have rested, simply remove the pot from the heat and let it wait.

INGREDIENTS

4	TABLESPOONS <u>EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE</u> OIL, DIVIDED, PLUS MORE TO SERVE
1	LARGE YELLOW ONION, FINELY CHOPPED
	KOSHER SALT AND GROUND BLACK PEPPER
6	MEDIUM GARLIC CLOVES, FINELY GRATED
1½	TEASPOONS RED PEPPER FLAKES, DIVIDED
6½	OUNCES (2½ CUPS) PANKO BREADCRUMBS
3	OUNCES PECORINO ROMANO CHEESE, 2 OUNCES FINELY GRATED (1 CUP), 1 OUNCE AS A CHUNK, PLUS MORE GRATED, TO SERVE
1	LARGE EGG, PLUS 1 LARGE EGG YOLK, BEATEN TOGETHER
1½	POUNDS 90 PERCENT LEAN GROUND BEEF
2	28-OUNCE CANS <u>WHOLE PEELED TOMATOES</u>
6-8	LARGE BASIL LEAVES

DIRECTIONS

Heat the oven to 475°F with a rack in the middle position. Line a rimmed baking sheet with kitchen parchment and mist with cooking spray. In a large Dutch oven over medium-high, heat 2 tablespoons oil until shimmering. Add the onion and ¼ teaspoon salt, then cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and 1 teaspoon pepper flakes; cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Remove the pot from the heat, then transfer half of the onion mixture to a large bowl.

In a medium bowl, combine the panko and 1¼ cups water; press the panko into the water and let stand until fully softened, about 5 minutes. Mash with your hands to a smooth paste, then add to the bowl with the onion mixture. Using a fork, mix until well combined and smooth. Stir in the grated cheese, beaten eggs, the remaining 2 tablespoons oil, ¾ teaspoons salt and 2 teaspoons black pepper. Add the meat and mix with your hands until completely homogenous.

Using a ½-cup dry measuring cup, divide the mixture into 8 portions. Using your hands, shape each into a compact ball and place on the prepared baking sheet, spacing them evenly apart. Refrigerate uncovered for 15 to 20 minutes. Re-shape the meatballs if they have flattened slightly, then bake until lightly browned, about 20 minutes. Let cool on the baking sheet set on a wire rack for about 10 minutes.

While the meatballs cook, in a food processor or blender, puree the tomatoes one can at a time with their juices until smooth, about 30 seconds, transferring the puree to a large bowl. Return the Dutch oven to medium and heat the remaining onion mixture, stirring, until warmed through, about 2 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes, remaining ½ teaspoon pepper flakes, the basil and the chunk of cheese. Bring to a simmer over medium-high and cook, stirring occasionally, until slightly thickened, about 15 minutes. Taste and season with salt and pepper.

Using a large spoon, carefully transfer the meatballs to the sauce, then, using 2 spoons, turn each to coat. Bring to a gentle simmer, then reduce to medium-low, cover and cook for 5 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat and let stand, covered, for about 5 minutes to allow the meatballs to firm up slightly. Remove and discard the pecorino chunk. Serve with additional grated cheese.
