

Tex-Mex Stuffed Shells

Serves 8

- 1 box (12 oz.) large pasta shells
- 1 batch ground beef filling (recipe follows)
- 1 batch tomato sauce (recipe follows)
- 1.5 cups (6 oz.) shredded Mexican cheese mix (or cheddar, Monterey jack, Chihuahua etc.)

Tomato Sauce

- 1 large (29 oz.) can tomato sauce
- 1/2 cup broth or water
- 2 tsp. chili powder
- 1 tsp. cumin
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp. onion powder
- 1 bay leaf

Ground Beef Filling

- 1 Tbsp. canola oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 green pepper, small dice
- 1 lb. lean ground beef
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/4 cup water (or beef broth)
- 1/8 tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1/2 tsp. cumin
- 1.25 tsp. chili powder
- 1/2 tsp. oregano
- 1 tsp. brown sugar
- 2 oz. cream cheese

Preheat the oven to 350. Boil the pasta shells until al dente.

Meanwhile, make the ground beef filling and tomato sauce. To make the sauce, combine all of the ingredients in a saucepan, along with salt and pepper to taste (if you use broth, you won't need much salt). Bring to a boil and then reduce to a simmer. Let the sauce slowly bubble and simmer, stirring occasionally, as you make your ground beef mixture.

To make the ground beef mixture: Heat a large heavy-bottomed skillet over medium heat. Add the canola oil and once shimmering, add the onions and green pepper. Cook for a couple of minutes until the vegetables begin to get tender. Add the beef and garlic. Cook the ground beef until browned, and then, if necessary, drain the fat off the beef. Add the water/beef broth, cayenne pepper, cumin, chili powder, oregano, brown sugar and salt and

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pepper to taste. Simmer over low heat until most of the water/broth has been absorbed. Re-season to taste if necessary. Allow the mixture to cool slightly before stirring in the cream cheese.

To assemble: Pour about 2/3 cup of the tomato sauce over a large baking dish (or two).

Stuff each shell with a tablespoon or so of the ground beef mixture, and place on top of the sauce in the pan. Continue until all the shells are stuffed. Pour the remaining tomato sauce over the shells, and then sprinkle with the cheese. Cover the baking dish with foil and bake for 20 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for an additional 5-10 until the cheese is bubbly and begins to brown.