

SPICY PORK MEATBALLS IN BROTHY TOMATOES AND TOASTED FENNEL

by Alison Roman, featured in **Nothing Fancy**:
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INTRODUCTION

Historically speaking, I have a bad attitude about meatballs. (I don't love minced meat, and also I once was dumped the morning after a meatball-forward meal, and, yes, I blame the meatballs.) But I will say that I am coming around. After all, meatballs are undeniably excellent for serving large amounts of people, and here we have crispy, garlicky pork in a delicious, garlicky, tomato-y sauce. What's not to love?

I will give you a heads-up here: while one is not better than the other, these are less red-sauce Italian and more Isle of Capri Italian (do they even have meatballs there? I'm not sure). They simmer in a light, brothy tomato sauce flecked with toasted spices and lots and lots of garlic, then are finished with fresh herbs, salty cheese, and an ocean of olive oil, if you're doing it right. Bound by yoghurt with no breadcrumbs or egg in sight, the meatballs are light, springy, and accidentally gluten-free, which is great – especially if you're gluten-free, I imagine.

But for me, what really sets these meatballs apart is that they go the fresh-tomato route rather than the tinned-tomato route, which I suppose makes them more a late-summer meatball rather than a wintry meatball. If you can get really ripe golden cherry tomatoes for this dish, they will light up your life and make this a pot of sunshine that you cannot help but dip some very toasty bread into, so as not to waste any of the delicious, porky sauciness.



Photo by Michael Graydon and
Nikole Herriott

INGREDIENTS

Serves: 4-6

- 6 cloves garlic (2 grated, the rest thinly sliced)
- 1 handful finely chopped chives
- 1 handful finely chopped fresh parsley (tender leaves and stems) - plus extra to garnish
- 125 grams full-fat greek yoghurt
- 2 teaspoons fennel seeds - plus extra to garnish
- 2 teaspoons hot smoked paprika
- 1½ teaspoons sea salt flakes
- 1 teaspoon chilli flakes - plus extra for serving
- 750 grams minced pork or lamb or beef or turkey - or feel free to mix
- freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil - plus extra for drizzling
- 1 large shallot (thinly sliced)
- 750 grams golden or red cherry tomatoes (halved)
- 60 millilitres distilled white vinegar or white wine vinegar
- 1 large handful mint leaves
- a hunk of pecorino cheese or parmesan cheese (for grating)
- toast or crusty bread (to serve)

METHOD

Spicy Pork Meatballs in Brothy Tomatoes and Toasted Fennel is a guest recipe by Alison Roman so we are not able to answer questions regarding this recipe

1. Place the grated garlic in a medium bowl along with the chives, parsley, yoghurt, fennel seeds, paprika, salt and chilli flakes. Mix until well combined.
2. Add the meat and season with pepper. Using your hands, mix until well combined. Roll the mixture into balls about the size of a plum; I like these meatballs on the smaller side. Place on a baking tray or large plate.
3. Heat the olive oil in a large heavy-based saucepan or flameproof casserole dish over medium-high heat. Add a few meatballs at a time, taking care not to crowd the pot. Cook, using tongs or a spatula to occasionally gently rotate them, until they are all golden brown all over, 8–10 minutes; they may not hold their perfectly round shape, but that is more than okay. As the meatballs are browned, transfer them to a large serving platter or plate. Leave the remaining bits and fat in the pot.
4. Add the shallot and sliced garlic to the pot and season with salt and pepper. Cook,

stirring occasionally, until the shallot is tender and the garlic starts to brown a bit, 2–3 minutes.

5. Add the tomatoes and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until they burst and become all saucy and caramelize a bit on the bottom of the pot, 5–8 minutes. Add the vinegar and 750 ml (25 fl oz / 3 cups) water, scraping up any bits along the bottom. Bring to a strong simmer and reduce the sauce by about one-quarter, just until it thickens slightly, 5–7 minutes; it should still be relatively brothy.
6. Return the meatballs to the pot and reduce the heat to medium–low. Simmer until the meatballs are cooked through and all the flavours have melded, 10–15 minutes.
7. Remove from the heat. To serve, top the meatballs (either in individual bowls or right in the pot) with the mint, and more chilli flakes and fennel seeds, if you like. Drizzle with olive oil and serve with the cheese for grating, and toast for dipping.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

DO AHEAD:

The meatball mixture can be made up to 1 day ahead (either kept in a bowl or shaped into meatballs), covered and refrigerated, or frozen for up to 1 month. The whole dish can be made up to 2 days ahead and refrigerated.

NOTE:

These meatballs and their tomato-y broth really want something to dip into them, like simple crusty bread, or perhaps very good garlic bread. They also want some bitter greens (like Escarole with Mustard and Spicy Guanciale Breadcrumbs), which can actually be eaten out of the same bowl, the leaves taking a brief dip in the broth to soften slightly – wow, yes please.
