

Maple-Mustard Meatballs – Comfort du Jour

These maple-mustard meatballs were delicious served over simple mashed potatoes. Rice or polenta would also be a nice accompaniment, or consider serving these meatballs straight from a slow cooker as a tasty game day appetizer.

INGREDIENTS

1 large, sweet or yellow onion* (see notes)
1 lb. fresh ground pork
1/3 lb. bulk breakfast sausage
1/3 cup panko breadcrumbs
1/4 cup milk
2 Tbsp. all-purpose flour
2 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
1 Tbsp. tomato paste
2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
3 Tbsp. real maple syrup*
2 cloves garlic, finely minced
Up to 1/2 cup low-sodium vegetable broth
2 Tbsp. smoked maple bourbon*

*NOTES

When I made these meatballs, I had reserved onion juice from the [Classic Crispy Latkes](#) I had made for the first night of Hanukkah. You will only use half of the large onion in this recipe, but you need the juice of the whole onion to flavor the simmering sauce.

I used a habanero-infused maple syrup for this recipe because my husband and I enjoy spicy foods. Any maple syrup would be delicious—but choose *real* maple for the best flavor. If the spicy flavor appeals to you, try using regular maple syrup and add about a teaspoon of cayenne or sriracha sauce for similar results.

The smoked maple bourbon is a Knob Creek product. It's optional in this recipe. If you avoid alcohol, simply omit this and use a splash of vegetable broth to deglaze the skillet.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Grate the onion, either with a box grater or food processor. Press the onion shreds into a mesh strainer to drain the juice. You will only use half of the grated onion, and reserve all of the juice for the maple-mustard sauce.
2. Add the ground pork and bulk sausage to a bowl and season with salt and pepper.
3. In a small bowl, combine the panko crumbs and milk and let them sit several minutes. The crumbs will absorb the milk; this is called a panade, and it improves the texture of meatballs or meatloaf.

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4. Combine the ground meats, grated onion and panade, but do not overwork the mixture. Scoop the mixture out, one rounded tablespoon at a time, and shape it into about 20 meatballs. They should be roughly the size of ping pong balls. Arrange the meatballs on a parchment-lined baking sheet and refrigerate for about 30 minutes to firm up the meat.
5. In a measuring cup, combine the Dijon, tomato paste, Worcestershire sauce, maple syrup, onion juice and garlic. Whisk until the mixture is smooth and blended, and add enough vegetable broth to total 1-1/2 cups.
6. Heat a cast-iron skillet over medium heat. Swirl in about a tablespoon of olive oil and carefully brown the pork meatballs (in two batches) in the skillet, turning to brown all sides. The meatballs will not be cooked all the way through, but they will finish in the sauce. Transfer the browned meatballs to layers of paper towel to absorb excess grease.
7. Drain two tablespoons of the skillet grease into a sauce pot large enough to hold all the meatballs. Discard any excess grease, but don't throw out the browned drippings. Pour a splash of the maple bourbon (or vegetable broth) into the skillet and stir or whisk to deglaze it. Those drippings will be added to the sauce pot.
8. Sprinkle the flour over the grease in the sauce pot. Cook over medium heat until the mixture is bubbly, then add the skillet drippings. Pour in all the maple-mustard sauce mixture and whisk until blended and thickened. Adjust the sauce to taste with salt and pepper.
9. Transfer the meatballs into the sauce, turning to coat them. Reduce the heat to low and cover the pot. Simmer for at least 30 minutes or up to one hour before serving.