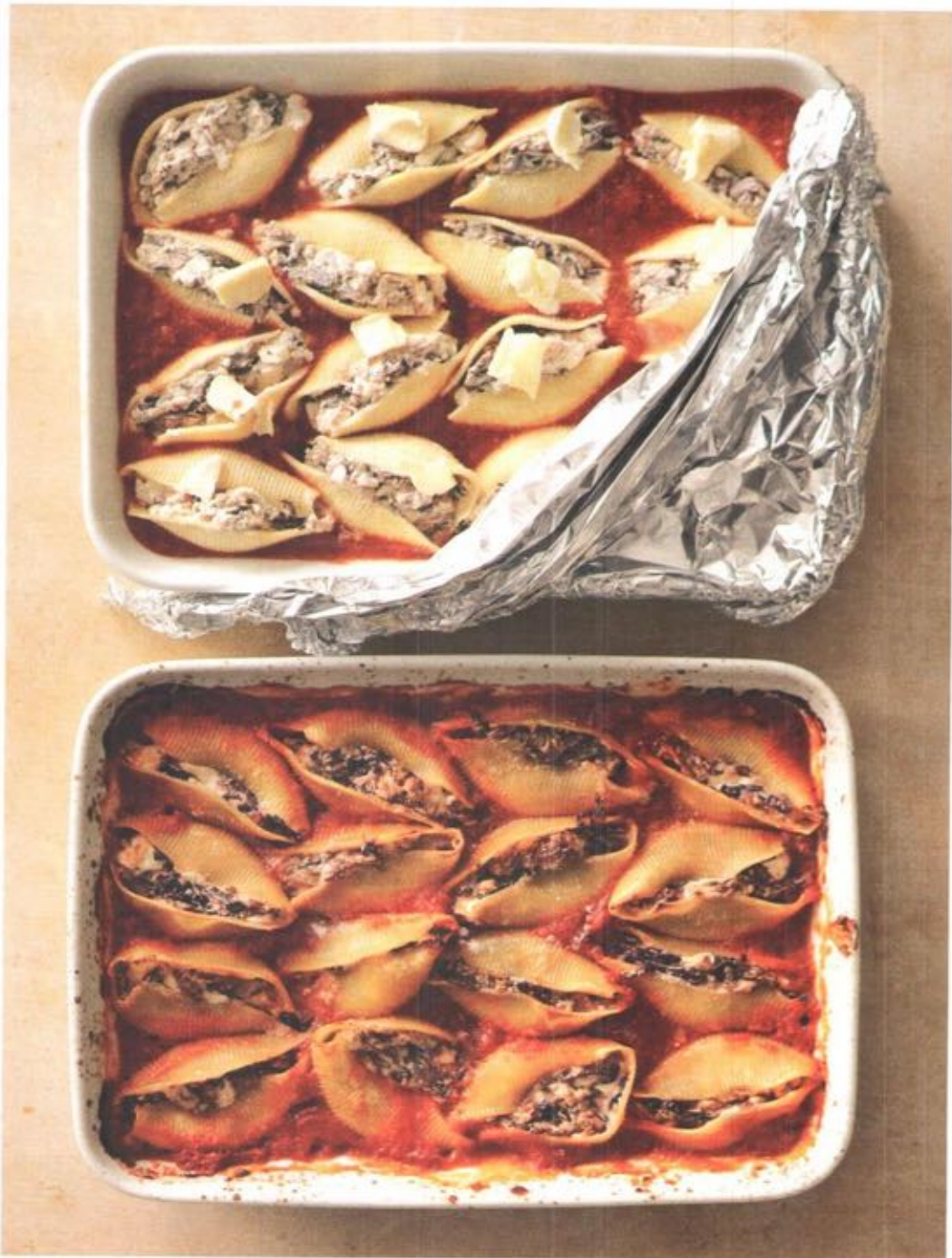


Pasta Night

With Lucinda Scala Quinn's **STUFFED SHELLS** in the freezer, a satisfying meal is always at the ready, whether you're cooking for a whole crew or just a few.



WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, there wasn't an Italian-side-of-the-family gathering that didn't feature stuffed shells. And for good reason: It's a make-in-advance, tailor-to-your-taste, feed-a-crowd kind of dish. My brother David carries on the tradition with our grandmother's old-school recipe, which calls for filling the shells with ricotta cheese. I kid him about how often they appear on his menu (um, always), but try eating just one of the luscious little clouds of creamy, savory scrumptiousness—it's impossible.

When I make the shells, I like to tinker with the stuffing. This version stays true to its cheesy roots but is studded with radicchio and prosciutto. I snuggle the shells into two freezer- and ovenproof trays, which gives me flexibility in terms of head count and makes them easier to store. This time of year, when holiday cooking collides with weeknight dinners, shells are especially smart, since they can go straight from freezer to oven to table. Dress them up or down, depending on the occasion. Their convenience and homey flavors are so appealing, surely the stuffed-shell torch will be passed on in your family, too.

SHELL GAME

Stuffed shells—pasta with a cheese filling—freeze beautifully. Baked and bubbly, they are a comfort-food classic, always welcome on the dinner table.

STUFFED SHELLS

ACTIVE TIME 20 MIN.

TOTAL TIME 1 HOUR 15 MIN.

MAKES 32 (IN TWO 8-BY-12-INCH DISHES)

SERVES 8 TO 10

You'll need to cook an entire box of shells, since some will break as they boil.

- 1 box (12 ounces) jumbo pasta shells
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 4 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 1 head radicchio, cored and shredded (4 cups)
- 1 teaspoon red-wine vinegar
- 12 ounces fresh ricotta cheese (1½ cups)
- 8 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, chilled and cut into small cubes (1 cup)
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
- 5 cups favorite tomato sauce
- Unsalted butter, for dotting
- Garnish: finely grated Parmesan cheese

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Cook pasta shells for 10 minutes. Drain, and rinse. Transfer to a bowl. Drizzle with oil. Let cool.
2. Meanwhile, heat oil in a large high-sided skillet over medium heat. Cook prosciutto, garlic, and onion, stirring, until prosciutto starts to caramelize, 6 to 8 minutes. Add radicchio; cook until tender but not mushy, about 4 minutes. Stir in vinegar; cook until evaporated. Let cool slightly. Stir in ricotta and mozzarella; season with salt and pepper.
3. Pour 2 cups tomato sauce into the bottom of each of two 8-by-12-inch baking dishes. Stuff 32 shells with 1 heaping tablespoon filling each. Pack 16 shells into each dish. Cover with foil. Freeze if desired.
4. Preheat oven to 375°. Dot shells with butter. Bake, covered, for 40 minutes. Uncover, and raise oven temperature to 450°. Bake until golden and bubbly, about 15 minutes more. Heat remaining cup tomato sauce; serve with shells. Garnish with Parmesan cheese.

MAKE AHEAD ASSEMBLED SHELLS CAN BE FROZEN, UNBAKED, FOR UP TO 1 MONTH.



READY FOR MORE?

Lucinda Scala Quinn serves up crowd-pleasing recipes on her new show on Hallmark Channel, weekdays at noon.

MAKE IT A MEAL

Serve the shells with a vegetable or a simple salad. Here, thin slices of fennel and celery are tossed in olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and pepper for a cool and crunchy counterpoint to the soft shells.



fill 'em up

Tailor the stuffing to your taste—or to whatever you have in the fridge.

When the prosciutto, garlic, and onion have been sautéed, add 4 cups of shredded sturdy greens (or reds), such as radicchio, Swiss chard, or Savoy cabbage. Once this base is cooked and has cooled, stir in ricotta and cubed mozzarella.