



Cocktail Meatballs in Tomato-Saffron Sauce (Albondigas al Azafran)

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS

Albondigas translate simply as meatballs and feature in many traditional Spanish dishes. The basics are very similar to Italian meatballs—a combination of ground meat (we like beef and pork), along with egg yolk (for richness and structure), bread mixed with milk to form a paste (for tenderness), and seasonings like salt, pepper, and parsley. Because these meatballs are meant to be consumed in one bite, we made them quite small—just 1 teaspoon of meatball mixture to make 1/2-inch-round meatballs. After browning the meatballs in a nonstick skillet (to prevent the meatballs from sticking and breaking apart), we removed them from the pan to prepare the sauce. Once the meatballs were cooked through, we stirred in the *picada* (a combination of ground almonds, parsley, garlic, saffron, and paprika) to infuse the sauce with vibrant flavor and an enticing aroma.



INGREDIENTS

Meatballs

- 2 slices high-quality white sandwich bread, torn into small pieces
- 1/3 cup whole milk
- 8 ounces 85 percent lean ground beef
- 8 ounces ground pork
- 1/2 ounce Manchego cheese or Parmesan cheese, grated (about 1/4 cup)
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1 medium garlic clove, minced or pressed through a garlic press

INSTRUCTIONS

We like to use a nonstick skillet in this recipe because it prevents the tender meatballs from sticking to the pan and breaking apart. Serve with toothpicks or cocktail forks.

1. **For the meatballs:** In a large bowl, mash the bread and milk together to form a smooth paste. Add the ground meats, Manchego, parsley, yolk, garlic, salt, and pepper to the mashed bread and mix until uniform. Shape the mixture into 1/2-inch-round meatballs (1 teaspoon per meatball; you should have 35 to 40 meatballs).
2. Heat the oil in a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add half of the meatballs and brown on all sides, about 10 minutes, reducing the heat if the oil begins to smoke. Transfer the meatballs to a paper towel-lined plate and repeat with the remaining meatballs. Discard all but 1 tablespoon of the oil left in the skillet.
3. **For the sauce:** Add the onion to the oil left in the skillet and cook over medium heat, scraping up any browned bits, until very soft and lightly

MAKES 35 TO 40 MEATBALLS

(about 1 teaspoon)

- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

Sauce

- 1 small onion, minced
- 1 small tomato, cored, seeded, and chopped medium
- 1 cup low-sodium chicken broth
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 2 bay leaves

Picada

- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley leaves
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped almonds
- 2 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 2 teaspoons)
- ¼ teaspoon saffron threads, crumbled
- ¼ teaspoon paprika

browned, 6 to 9 minutes. Stir in the tomato and cook for 1 minute. Stir in the broth, wine, and bay leaves, then carefully return the meatballs to the skillet. Cover and simmer until the meatballs are just cooked through, 5 to 10 minutes.

4. For the Picada: While the meatballs cook, prepare the picada by mashing together the parsley, almonds, garlic, saffron, paprika, 1/8 teaspoon salt, and a pinch pepper. When the meatballs are cooked, remove and discard the bay leaves. Stir the picada into the sauce and season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer the meatballs and sauce to a serving dish and serve immediately.