

Meatballs for any occasion, including the Super Bowl

These variations will make you the MVP at any Super Bowl party.

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Sometimes there's a disconnect between the proclamations of food gurus and what regular folks eat. Not so in the case of meatballs. Once labeled "dish of the year" by Bon Appetit magazine, meatballs are welcome everywhere.

They were the unexpected star of the buffet table at a holiday party I attended with 40 other guys. There sat six — six! — casseroles filled with meatballs, most of which were ground beef in tomato sauce. And nearly every ball was gone by the end of the night.

"Meatballs are the ultimate cure-all for anything that ails you," write Daniel Holzman and Michael Chernow in "The Meatball Shop Cookbook" (Ballantine, \$28). Though these New York City restaurateurs are thinking "hangover, breakup, lack of sleep, even a crying baby," you should think meatballs for your Super Bowl XLVI feast.

Football and meatballs just seem to go together — especially around a widescreen TV and plenty of cold beer. You can, of course, serve up that traditional ground beef meatball and float it in a pool of tomato sauce. Or jazz up your game plan by experimenting with meats, flavors and presentations.

Nearly every culture has a meatball, as Rick Rodgers, author of the new cookbook, "I Love Meatballs!" (Andrews McMeel, \$19.99), makes clear. His 55 recipes range around the world, from Tuscan olive-stuffed rounds to Thai pork and shrimp balls to a Texas meatball chili soup.

"Every cuisine has them because they're economical and easy to make," says Rodgers. "They also just taste great. You can make them ahead, warm them up, and they just get better."

Don't feel limited to just one platter of meatballs — offer a variety. Here we serve up recipes for a game-day buffet. Serve as they are, or with the suggested accompaniments.

Meatballs 101

Tips to making and serving meatballs from "The Meatball Shop Cookbook," by Daniel Holzman and Michael Chernow, with Lauren Deen.

- **Serving sizes and saucing:** The Meatball Shop's standard serving is four 1 1/2-inch balls. Count on 1/4 cup sauce for each 1 1/2-inch ball. Serving pasta? "Add cooked pasta right into the pan to soak up the sauce and flavor," the authors suggest.

- **Make ahead:** Meatballs can be made a day in advance and baked up to 24 hours later. Or, bake immediately and refrigerate for up to three days before reheating.

- **Storage:** Refrigerate with or without sauce, for up to three days. Freeze, with or without sauce, for up to 3 months.

- **Reheating:** Microwave 4 minutes, 6 minutes if frozen. Bake, covered, in a 300-degree oven, 20 minutes. Cook on the stove top, covered, with 2 or 3 tablespoons of water over medium heat, 10 minutes.

Photos



Three meatball recipes for Super Bowl Sunday include from left: spicy, Asian Teriyaki, and Greek.



Bill Hogan/MCT

This spicy meatball recipe includes jarred hot cherry peppers.

SPICY PORK MEATBALLS

Prep: 30 minutes

Cook: 20 minutes

Makes: 24 meatballs

From "The Meatball Shop Cookbook." Serve on a baguette as a sub, or plate on a bed of creamy polenta; spoon on a spicy meat sauce.

2 pounds pork shoulder, ground

1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon salt

4 jarred hot cherry peppers, minced

1/4 cup hot cherry pepper pickling liquid

4 slices fresh white bread, finely chopped

3 large eggs

Heat oven to 450 degrees. In a large bowl, mix pork, salt, cherry peppers, pickling liquid, bread and eggs by hand until thoroughly incorporated.

Roll into golf ball-sized meatballs, packing the meat firmly. Place the balls in a lightly oiled 9-by-13-inch baking dish touching one another.

Bake until firm and cooked through, 20 minutes. Cool 5 minutes in the baking dish before serving.

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