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meatball mania

Meatballs have gone from numbie nonne-cooking staple to star of the dinner table—and their versatility makes them perfect partner for a variety of wines.

by
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For an update on the world of meatballs circa 2011, you could do worse than drop by The Meatball Shop in Manhattan's East Village for the "Daily Ball," possibly the Reuben Balls with Thousand Island dressing.

Or, if you're not in the neighborhood, click on the Web site (themeatballshop.com) and meet the Meatball Smash, two meatballs mashed on a brioche bun, and the daintier Meatball Slider, billed giddily as "three bites of sheer ecstasy, then they're gone forever." In another dish, called Everything But The Kitchen Sink Salad, meatballs are plopped on the chef's selection of greenmarket veggies and lettuces—this is presumably for those on a diet.



Spicy Pork with
Spicy Meat
Sauce, The
Meatball Shop

three steps to fabulous meatballs

We've all had the dry, dense meatball that sits like a brick in your stomach. And, with luck, you've had meltingly voluptuous meatballs, too. Some tricks from the pros for turning out masterful meatballs:

Use high-quality meat. The Meatball Shop's Web site lists sources of naturally raised beef, heritage pork and other meats used in the Manhattan restaurant's balls. For your own, seek out top-drawer ground meat, ask the butcher to do a custom grind, or grind your own mix (see recipe).

The right ratio. The meat to lipid ratio must be balanced. The lipids need to moisturize and flavor the meatballs without overpowering and making the mix taste greasy," says José Navarro, executive chef of d.vino Italian Food & Wine Bar at Monte Resort & Casino, Las Vegas. In other words, use enough fat, but not too much. For Chef Anthony Lamas of Seviche in Louisville, Kentucky, two parts lean to one part fat is the right formula: "Sometimes I add a little water, citrus juice or vinegar for moisture."

Easy on other ingredients. "The binder for the meatballs should be just that—not a filler. We use baguettes soaked in milk and whole eggs," says Navarro. Similarly, take care not to overdo seasonings such as herbs, spices, garlic and onion. It's a good idea to fry a small patty from the seasoned mixture, taste and adjust seasoning before cooking the whole batch.