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Kid-Friendly Recipe: Ravioli Lasagna from "The Muffin Tin Cookbook"

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If, like me, you're a sucker for bite-size foods, you'll have plenty to look forward to with author Brette Sember and contributor Melinda Boyd's recipe collection, *The Muffin Tin Cookbook*. My infinite love for mini foods runs deep — and much like fighting the urge to hit up the grocery store when you're starving, this is one cookbook that you don't want to be reading while your stomach is growling.

Muffin tin recipes and meals for kids have been all the rage in the past five years -- at least I know that I'm not alone in my quest for petite food cuteness! But, besides being "totally a-door-bell," as my favorite seven-year-old niece would say, there are many benefits to making muffin tin meals and snacks for both grown-ups and kids. Here are my top three reasons why I love them:

1. Perfectly-sized portions

No one likes to deprive themselves of foods they can't stop pining for -- and that's exactly where *The Muffin Tin Cookbook's* recipes come in handy! Each of the 200 recipes included in the collection contain all of the nutritional data needed for making good choices, while still getting in a couple of bites full of deliciousness. Sure, I might not be able to devour an entire muffin tin of the included twice-baked stuffed potatoes, but I can certainly go back for seconds with the healthy white pizza cups (think pesto and artichoke hearts and lean chicken... Yum!). But really, portion control can be a blessing in disguise for both kids and adults -- and these snacky sizes are sure to help you find a happy medium.

Thanks to Boyd (a dietician by trade who works in clinical and food service settings), a large amount of the featured recipes have a little plant symbol next to them, meaning that they contain low amounts of saturated fat and sodium. Many of the recipes also call for low-fat yogurt and other healthy alternatives where creamy dairy-based products are typically included.

2. Excellent for parties and leftovers

Perfect for appetizers, and for offering up a variety of tastes to a large group, mini dishes are the way to go when you've got a hungry crowd on your hands — especially one that includes veggie folks, gluten-free diets, picky eaters, and beyond. Plus, when all of your guests have headed home for the night, you can easily store or save the rest of your savory treats or sweets for the week's family lunches, or for snacks. (And your usual clean-up time will likely be cut in half!)

3. The creativity is endless!

Who would have ever imagined cooking up dinner in a muffin tin? Yeah, Grandma Jean might sniff at the idea of using her trusty tin for anything other than her melt-in-your-mouth muffins, but once she tries Sember and Boyd's Italian mac and cheese or a bite-sized cup of their chicken Florentine meatloaf, she's bound to be a believer. And for the kiddos — a tin of comdog cups or meatballs in spaghetti nests are sure to do the trick. Mini taco pies? Sloppy Joe cupcakes? You may even just get a "yes, please," out of the deal!

And though there are dozens of simple kid-friendly recipes featured throughout, many of the recipes have a level of sophistication that adults can appreciate as well. Some standouts: shrimp risotto, peanut chicken with crunchy soba noodles, wild rice fritatas, peanut butter and jelly muffins (a winner all-around!), strawberry trifle... and the list goes on.

For a tasty sneak-peek at what *The Muffin Tin Cookbook* has to offer, don't miss out on this family-friendly recipe for ravioli lasagna. And, be sure to check back later this week — we've got a copy of this fun cookbook to give away to one lucky reader!

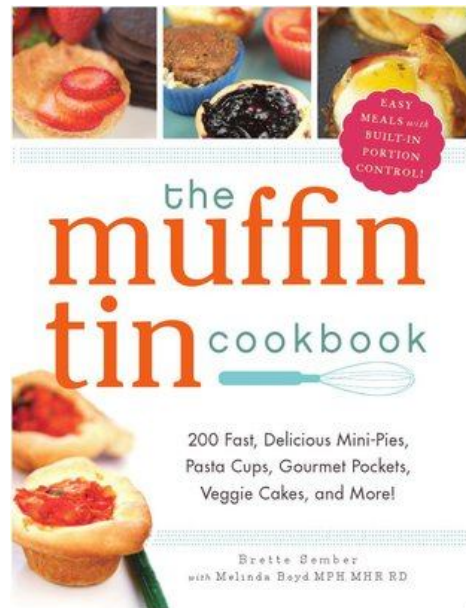
Ravioli Lasagna

Serves 6, using a jumbo muffin tin

At last, lasagna made easy! Ravioli are the perfect base for lasagna made in muffin cups, providing not only the pasta, but the cheesy sauce.

Ingredients:

12 round ravioli, any kind
 1/2 cup part-skim ricotta cheese
 1/4 tsp. Italian seasoning
 1/8 tsp. garlic powder
 Salt and pepper to taste
 1 Tbsp. skim milk
 1 24-ounce jar spaghetti sauce
 3/4 cup shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese
 3 tsp. grated Parmesan cheese



Preparation:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F and prepare 6 jumbo muffin cups with foil or silicone liners. Spray the liners with cooking spray.
2. Cook the ravioli according to package instructions until al dente.
3. In a small bowl, mix ricotta, Italian seasoning, garlic powder, salt, pepper, and milk.
4. Cut each ravioli in half, so you have two circles (it's okay if the filling ends up mostly on one side). (This step allows all the flavors to combine like a real lasagna.)
5. Place 2 tsp. of spaghetti sauce in the bottom of each cup.
6. In each cup, layer 1/2 of a ravioli (skin side down), 1 tsp. ricotta mix, 1 tsp. mozzarella, and 2 tsp. spaghetti sauce on top. Repeat this two more times in each cup.
7. Top each cup with 1/2 of a ravioli (skin side up).
8. Top with 2 tsp. spaghetti sauce and 1/2 tsp. Parmesan.
9. Bake for 15 minutes until bubbly. Allow to cool and set for a few minutes before you remove the cups from the muffin pan.



Nutritional Content:

Calories: 233 calories
Fat: 9.1 grams
Protein: 11.2 grams
Sodium: 688 mg
Carbohydrates: 26.5 grams
Sugars: 11 grams
Fiber: 3.6 grams

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