

Menu
[Caesar Salad](#)
[Cannelloni](#)
[Chocolate-Dipped Macaroons](#)

The Game Plan

The day before (or up to a few days ahead):

(1½ hours)

- Make the marinara sauce.
- While the marinara is simmering, make the ricotta.
- While the ricotta is draining, make the balsamella sauce.
- Seal the marinara sauce, ricotta, and balsamella in airtight containers and chill overnight.
- Handwash the dishes and/or load the dishwasher, and clean up the kitchen.

Early in the day:

(1 hour and 15 minutes)

- Mix the pasta dough and let it rest for one hour.
- While the pasta dough rests, make and bake the cookies.
- While the cookies bake, wash and dry the lettuce for the salad, then chill it.
- Handwash the dishes and/or load the dishwasher, and clean up the kitchen.

After the pasta dough has rested, or any time during the day but at least 2½ hours before dinner:

(1½ hours)

- Brown the sausage for the cannelloni.
- Roll out the pasta and assemble the cannelloni, up to the point of covering the dish with marinara sauce, but not with the balsamella.
- Melt the chocolate and dip the cookies.
- Handwash the dishes and/or load the dishwasher, and run it. Clean up the kitchen.
- Set the table.

1 hour before dinner:

(35 minutes total, with 20 minutes of hands-on time)

- Heat the oven for the cannelloni. While the oven heats, warm the balsamella in a small saucepan over medium-low heat.
- Empty the dishwasher.
- When the oven is hot, pour the balsamella over the cannelloni, cover the dish with foil, and bake for 20 minutes.
- Wash the pan used for the balsamella sauce.

25 minutes before dinner:

(25 minutes)

- Remove the foil from the cannelloni and set the baking time for 20 more minutes.
- Meanwhile, open the dinner wine to let it breathe.

- Make the Caesar salad.
- Light the candles.
- After the cannelloni has finished baking, put it under the broiler for 2 or 3 minutes to brown the top. Remove the cannelloni to a cooling rack to rest.
- Start the dinner music.
- Enjoy the Caesar salad while the cannelloni rests.
- Then serve the cannelloni.

After dinner:

- While your partner does the dishes and cleans up the kitchen, arrange the cookies on a serving plate.

Notes:

- The hands-on work time estimates (in parentheses below the start times) are for one person doing it all, but many tasks can be shared or delegated.
- Making the pasta dough, assembling the cannelloni, and baking the cookies could all be done the day before if you prefer. If you're doing all three of these steps ahead, pick up again on this timeline with the "1 hour before dinner" tasks, and add the washing of the lettuce and setting of the table in among these other last-hour steps.