

Belgian Meatballs

Ground meats are all outside, no inside, which is why they need to be cooked to higher temperatures than whole-muscle intact cuts. There's a reason cafeterias, hospitals, and airlines don't serve medium-rare hamburgers: the potential for foodborne illness is too great. But meatballs, customarily being cooked ahead of time, are always cooked to done and delicious.

There's only one wrong way to make a meatball, and that's to undercook it. Otherwise, seasoning and serving style are entirely up to your tastes. Every culture has some form of meatball dish that combines various ground meats with spices. Belgian meatballs, ballekes, are made with a combination of ground beef, ground pork, onions, and breadcrumbs, which suits my tastes. Any mixture of ground meats will work; just make sure you have enough fat in whatever you use, or the meatballs will come out tough and dry. As for seasonings, that's down to personal preference. Try adding bacon, fennel, chili pepper, or whatever else inspires you.

Set out a plate with a sheet of plastic wrap on top, for the uncooked meatballs.

In a medium to large bowl, mix:

- 1 medium (110g) onion, finely chopped**
- ½ cup (45g) breadcrumbs, about 1 slice of bread**
- 2 tablespoons (8g) dried oregano**
- 1 teaspoon (6g) salt**

Add:

- 1 large (50g) egg**
- ½ pound (~250g) ground pork**
- ½ pound (~250g) ground beef, 80–85% muscle / 15–20% fat**

Using your fingers, work the mix together, loosely pulling the ground meat apart as necessary to combine. Mixing with a spoon won't work as well; plus it'll mash up the meat more.

Form meatballs—I like mine at about a 2" / 5 cm diameter, but if you're using them in soup, go smaller—and transfer them to a plate. Wash your hands and the bowl thoroughly.

In a sauté pan over medium heat, melt **2 tablespoons (30g) of butter**. Once it's melted, use a pair of tongs to place about half the meatballs in the pan, taking care to not overly crowd the pan. Cook the meatballs, flipping them every few minutes, until the entire outside is deep brown. Wash the tongs once the outsides of the meatballs are uniformly brown.

Once the meatballs are seared, optionally add sauce to the pan—**2 cups (480 mL) pasta sauce** should about fill the pan—and simmer it over low heat. Otherwise, continue sautéing the meatballs over medium heat or finish them in a moderately hot oven.

Cook until a digital probe thermometer poked into the center of the meatballs shows a temperature of 160°F / 71°C. The model I have has a long lead cable and alarm mode, so I set it to beep at 155°F / 68°C to let me know when cooking is almost done.

In the US, "hamburger" can have beef fat added to it; "ground beef" cannot.
