

Eggplant Parmesan

Mark Bittman

6 servings

Time: About 1 hour, longer if you choose to salt the eggplant.

Though this is really a dish in which the eggplant loses some of its identity, it's as gooey and filling as lasagne (though it's equally good without the mozzarella), and more flavorful. If you use Broiled Eggplant Slices in this dish, you can skip sautéing the eggplant.

Other vegetables that work: Zucchini (cut lengthwise).

INGREDIENTS

- 2 medium-to-large eggplant (2 to 3 pounds total)
- Salt
- Olive oil as needed
- Flour for dredging
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cups Fast Tomato Sauce (page XXX)
- 1/2 pound grated mozzarella cheese, about 2 cups (optional)
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus more if you omit the mozzarella
- About 30 basil leaves

DIRECTIONS

1. Peel the eggplant if the skin is thick or the eggplant is less than perfectly firm. Cut it into 1/2-inch-thick slices and salt it if you like.
2. When you're ready to cook, heat the oven to 350 F. Put about 3 tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet and turn the heat to medium. When the oil is hot (a pinch of flour will sizzle), dredge the eggplant slices, one at a time, in the flour, shaking off the excess. Put in the pan, but do not crowd; you will have to cook in batches. Cook for 3 or 4 minutes on each side, until nicely browned, then drain on paper towels. Add some pepper to the slices as they cook, as well as some salt if you did not salt the eggplant. Add more oil to the skillet as needed.
3. Lightly oil a baking dish, then spoon a little of the tomato sauce into it. Top with a layer of eggplant, then a thin layer of each of the cheeses, and finally a few basil leaves. Repeat until all the ingredients are used up, reserving some of the basil for garnish. End with a sprinkling of Parmesan.
4. Bake for 20 to 30 minutes, or until the dish is bubbling hot. Mince the remaining basil and sprinkle over the top. Serve hot or at room temperature.

Eggplant Layered with Vegetables. More in the style of Eastern European dishes: Steps 1 and 2 remain the same. When you remove the eggplant from the oil, sauté 1 carrot, peeled and diced; 2 red bell peppers, cored, seeded, and diced; 20 cloves garlic, peeled; 2 stalks celery, trimmed and chopped; and 1 large onion, diced — all until fairly soft, about 10 minutes. In Step 3, omit the cheese and basil, and layer the eggplant and tomato sauce with the cooked vegetables and a liberal amount of chopped parsley. Bake as above.

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