

Eggplant Alla Parmagiana

An Italian Casserole

This dish is baked in an oven and is best served over pasta such as linguini. The dish is composed of layers of batter-fried eggplant slices covered in Italian red (tomato) sauce interposed with mozzarella, romano and parmesan cheeses.

Preparing the Eggplant

Ingredients:

- 2-3 medium-sized eggplants (firm, with no discolorations or soft spots)
- 2 cups flour
- 5 eggs, beaten
- 1-2 cups olive oil
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- ground cayenne or chipotle powder, to taste

Preparation:

Peel eggplants, discard ends. Slice into $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch rounds. Combine flour with spices into medium-sized, flat-bottomed bowl. (*Note: ground cayenne or chipotle adds zest, but don't overdo it.*) Pour beaten eggs into another flat bottomed dish.

Heat olive oil in frying pan, preferably stick-proof. (*Do not overheat olive oil; it can flash.*) Dredge eggplant rounds in flour, then egg, then flour again. Fry each dredged slice in oil until both sides are slightly brown. It is important that the oil heat be controlled; it must be neither too hot nor too cool, since eggplant slices are cooked during this process.

Stack completed eggplant slices on paper or cloth towels to absorb extraneous oil.

Preparing the Sauce and Pasta

Ingredients:

- 1 largish onion, chopped fine
- 5-10 cloves fresh garlic, peeled and chopped fine
- 5-8 roma tomatoes, chopped into ¼ inch pieces.
- Fresh basil, chopped, to taste
- Fresh or dried oregano, to taste (*don't skimp*)
- Fresh or dried marjoram, to taste
- Fresh or dried rosemary, to taste (*you may want to grind or chop leaves*)
- Bay leaf (*take care to remove before using sauce*)
- 1 large can stewed Italian tomatoes, romas if possible
- 1 small can tomato paste
- 1 cup white wine (*optional*)
- 2-4 links Italian sausage (*optional*)
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- 1 standard jar prepared spaghetti sauce (*your choice; or add sufficient additional stewed tomatoes*)
- ½ cup olive oil
- 2 red bell peppers, chopped (*optional*)
- Package of your favorite pasta (*optional, see below*)

Preparation:

If using Italian sausage, remove skins and fry slowly in sauce pan or skillet in a tablespoon or two of olive oil until you can chop up the sausages with a spatula. Then check that no pink meat remains.

In large sauce pan, heat olive oil or continue with oil from sausages. Sautee garlic, add onion pieces, then add red bell pepper pieces. When onion is translucent, add basil, oregano, marjoram, rosemary, bay leaf and tomato paste. Allow paste to fry for a minute or two. Add canned stewed tomatoes, prepared spaghetti sauce, white wine.

Let the sauce simmer, checking that the bottom never sticks or burns. Partially cover and leave for one hour.

If serving on pasta, prepare your favorite pasta as desired but be sure to salt the water. Pasta is optional, especially if you're serving other side dishes or if eggplant is only one course in a meal.

Constructing the Dish

Ingredients:

- ½ to one pound mozzarella cheese, grated
- ¼ to ½ pound parmesan cheese, grated
- ¼ to ½ pound romano cheese, grated

Preparation:

Use oblong casserole pan or baking dish. Cover the bottom with a ladleful of sauce, spread out. Then add a layer of batter-fried eggplant slices. Cover layer with sauce, then sprinkle cheeses over top of layer as desired. Continue process until pan is full. (*Don't overfill or you'll have a messy oven.*)

Remember to leave sufficient cheeses (esp. mozzarella) to cover top of pan.

Bake in a 350° oven for 20-30 minutes until mozzarella is brown and sauce is bubbling along all sides of the pan.

Serving

It is best to let the pan cool for 20 minutes. Serve like lasagna (that is, stacks of eggplant rounds cut from the pan) over pasta.