

Eggplant Stuffed with Rice & Tomatoes



INGREDIENTS

2 ½ to 3 pounds small or medium eggplants

Salt to taste

1 ½ pounds tomatoes, grated on the large holes of a box grater

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

4 to 6 garlic cloves to taste, minced

½ cup uncooked long-grain or basmati rice

½ cup finely chopped cilantro

3 tablespoons finely chopped mint

Freshly ground pepper to taste

Juice of 2 lemons

½ teaspoon ground allspice

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

¼ teaspoon sugar

3 tablespoons tomato paste

PREPARATION

Cut the eggplants in half. With a grapefruit spoon or a small knife, remove the flesh to within 1/2 inch of the skins.

Sprinkle the eggplant shells with salt, and let sit for 30 minutes while you prepare the remaining ingredients. Chop the flesh, and steam for 20 minutes, until tender.

In a large bowl, combine a third of the tomatoes, the steamed eggplant, 2 tablespoons of the olive oil, all but 1 clove of the garlic, the rice, herbs and the juice of one of the lemons. Season with salt and pepper.

Oil a large flameproof casserole or an earthenware casserole set over a flame tamer. Combine the remaining tomatoes, olive oil, allspice, cinnamon, lemon juice, sugar, tomato paste and remaining garlic in the casserole. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Fill the eggplant shells with the rice mixture, and arrange in the casserole in a single layer. Add water if necessary to cover about a third of the eggplant. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat, cover tightly and reduce the heat to low. Simmer 45 minutes to an hour until the eggplant and rice are tender. Remove from the heat.

Using two spatulas (the eggplants are soft at this point), transfer the eggplants to a platter. Bring the sauce to a boil. If it is not already thick, reduce until thick and fragrant. Pour over the eggplants, and allow to cool to warm or room temperature. They're good chilled as well. Garnish with chopped fresh parsley or cilantro if desired.

Tip

Advance preparation: These taste even better the day after they're made; they firm up in the refrigerator and are easier to handle. They will keep for about four days in the refrigerator. I like them cold.

<http://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1014197-eggplant-stuffed-with-rice-and-tomatoes>