

Vegetable Stuffed Sicilian Eggplant

Begin by preparing this **Simple Tomato Sauce**. You will have more sauce than you need for this recipe. The remainder can be frozen or enjoyed on pasta.

Simple Tomato Sauce

- 1 red onion, chopped
- 5 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1/4 c chopped basil
- 1/2 c chopped parsley
- 2 T olive oil
- 1/4 c white wine
- 1 28 oz can tomatoes - pureed
- 1 24 oz jar Italian tomato sauce
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat the olive oil. Cook onion and garlic on medium low for several minutes to soften, then add wine, tomatoes and tomato sauce. Bring to a boil, then simmer for 75 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the basil and parsley, and cook 15 more minutes.

Vegetarian Stuffed Sicilian Eggplant

- 6 Sicilian eggplants
- 2 T olive oil
- 6 mushrooms, diced
- 1 small red onion, finely chopped
- 7 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 zucchini, diced
- 5 oz spinach, roughly chopped
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

- 2 slices whole wheat bread, cubed
- 4 oz grated asiago
- 4 1/2 oz grated mozzarella - 3 oz for stuffing, remainder for topping
- 3 oz grated parmesan
- 2 oz bocconcini, diced
- 2 c simple tomato sauce - 1/2 for stuffing, 1 for baking dish, 1/2 for topping
- 1/4 homemade breadcrumbs - or more to get a semi-firm stuffing
- 1/3 c chopped basil
- 1/2 c chopped parsley

Trim and halve the eggplant: Wash the eggplant. Remove the dried leaves at the stem end and the bottom brown spot. Careful, they may be prickly. Slice off the stem, then slice in half from top to bottom. Score the central flesh, cutting into it with a knife, to make it easier to scoop-out the flesh with a spoon. Maintain half an inch thickness as a shell to hold the stuffing. Chop the scooped-out flesh to add to the stuffing, keeping it in a separate bowl.

Blanching the eggplant: Bring a large pot of water to boil. Blanch the **eggplant shells** for 4 minutes after the water comes back to a boil. Rotate them carefully as they are fragile. Remove them with a large strainer or a slotted spoon. Rinse them in cold water to halt the cooking process. Drain all the water off, drying them with a paper towel. Blanch the chopped **eggplant flesh** for 4 minutes. Strain it well, pressing slightly. The eggplant shells and flesh can be frozen at this stage.

Prepare the stuffing: Heat the olive oil on medium-high in a large frying pan. Cook the onion and garlic on medium-low for about 4 minutes so that they soften without browning. Add the mushrooms, cooking for 4 minutes. Add the pepper and zucchini. Cook until the vegetables are tender. Add the spinach, parsley, basil, salt and pepper.

Let the vegetable mixture cool then mix in the parmesan, cubed bread, tomato sauce, 3 ounces of mozzarella, asiago, bocconcini, breadcrumbs, the blanched eggplant pulp, salt and pepper.

Stuffing: Before stuffing the shells, sprinkle them with a little salt and pepper. Stuff them, squeezing slightly, to make an oval shape. Top them with a little tomato sauce and mozzarella. Bake, covered, at 350F for 30-40 minutes. Serves 6 - 8. Can be frozen.

If there is extra stuffing, use it to fill halved bell peppers, mushroom caps or scooped-out zucchini. They will require an additional 15 minutes in the oven.