

Preparing Eggplant for Cooking

Salting eggplant is a preparation method some cooks utilize to extract out the bitterness. Although it is generally not effective for taking away bitterness (be sure to buy fresh eggplant and you won't have this problem), it IS an excellent way to draw out the vegetable's moisture so that it remains firm upon cooking. Be sure to rinse and squeeze properly after salting so you don't add too much additional sodium to the overall dish which is not advisable to those on sodium-restricted diets. If you are genuinely concerned about bitterness, choose an eggplant that is smaller, free of dings or soft spots, and is deep and shiny in color, which are all hallmarks of fresh eggplant.

Eggplant can be baked, roasted in the oven, or steamed. If baking it whole, pierce the eggplant several times with a fork to make small holes for the steam to escape. Bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit (about 177 degrees Celsius) for 15 to 25 minutes, depending upon size. You can test for its readiness by gently inserting a knife or fork to see if it passes through easily.

A Few Quick Serving Ideas

- Mix cubed baked eggplant with brown rice, grilled peppers, onions and garlic and top with balsamic vinaigrette.
- Stuff miniature Japanese eggplants with a mixture of feta cheese, pine nuts and roasted peppers.
- Add eggplant to your next Indian curry stir-fry.

Try this recipe:

Eggplant Parmesan

Eggplant parmesan is usually made with fried eggplant, tons of mozzarella and parmesan. While delicious, the eggplant quickly becomes a sponge for the oil, and with the addition of mounds of cheese, you end up turning a nutritious vegetable into a fat bomb. To reduce calories and fat, bake the eggplant instead of frying it. Also, use egg whites and part-skim mozzarella cheese. It's delicioso!

Makes 6 servings

ACTIVE TIME: 25 minutes

TOTAL TIME: 1 hour 10 minutes

EASE OF PREPARATION: Moderate

2 eggplants (about 2 pounds total)

3 egg whites

3 tablespoons water

1 cup fine dry breadcrumbs
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese (1 ounce), divided
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
1/4 cup slivered fresh basil leaves
2 1/2 cups tomato sauce
3/4 cup grated part-skim mozzarella cheese (3 ounces)

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Coat two baking sheets and an 8 x 11 ½ inch baking dish with nonstick cooking spray.
2. Cut eggplants crosswise into ¼ inch-thick slices. Whisk egg whites and water in a shallow dish until frothy. Combine breadcrumbs, 1/4 cup of the Parmesan, salt and pepper in another shallow dish. Dip the eggplant slices into the egg-white mixture, then coat with the breadcrumb mixture. (Discard any leftover breadcrumbs and egg white.) Arrange the eggplant slices in a single layer on the prepared baking sheets. Bake for 15 minutes, turn the eggplant slices over, and bake until crisp and golden, about 15 minutes longer.
3. Stir basil into tomato sauce. Spread about 1/2 cup of the sauce in the bottom of the prepared baking dish. Arrange half of the eggplant slices over the sauce, overlapping slightly. Spoon 1 cup of the remaining sauce over the eggplant and sprinkle with half of the mozzarella cheese. Add a layer of the remaining eggplant slices and top with the remaining sauce, mozzarella and Parmesan. Bake, uncovered, until the sauce bubbles and the top is golden, 15 to 20 minutes.

NUTRITION INFORMATION: Per serving: 203 calories; 6 g fat (3 g sat, 2 g mono); 13 mg cholesterol; 29 g carbohydrate; 12 g protein; 8 g fiber; 563 mg sodium; 777 mg potassium.

Nutrition bonus: Vitamin C (70% daily value), Vitamin A (25% dv), Potassium (22% dv), Calcium (20% dv).

1 1/2 Carbohydrate Servings

Recipe from EatingWell. For more recipes:

http://www.eatingwell.com/recipes/collections/healthy_eggplant_recipes.html