

Eggplant Parmigiana

For the Tomato Sauce

1 red onion
4 garlic cloves
½ teaspoon dried chili peppers
1 teaspoon thyme
⅓ cup olive oil
28-ounce can whole tomatoes
14-ounce can crushed tomatoes
6-ounce can tomato paste
¼ cup chopped fresh basil
1 tablespoon fresh oregano
Pinch of sea salt
Black pepper to taste
1 teaspoon sugar

For the Tomato Sauce

Chop the red onion and gently sauté it in the olive oil with the peperoncino (dried chili peppers) and the thyme until the onion is softened, but not browned. Mince the garlic, and add it to the onions, cooking for about 2 minutes, without burning the garlic.

Add the entire cans of whole and crushed tomatoes, including the liquid, plus the tomato paste. Crush down on the whole tomatoes until they are broken into small pieces.

Add the chopped fresh basil and oregano. Stir in some sea salt to taste, along with a teaspoon of sugar. Simmer the sauce uncovered for about 40 minutes until thickened. Taste again to correct the seasonings.

For the Eggplant

Leaving the skin on, slice the eggplants vertically in less than ¼-inch-thick steaks.

Sift the flour onto one plate. Season the panko on a separate plate. Beat the eggs well in a shallow bowl. Dip the eggplant slices on both sides, first into the flour, then the beaten eggs, and finally the panko, being certain the crumbs adhere to the slices.

In a large skillet heat about ¼-inch-deep of vegetable oil until hot over medium-high heat. Brown the breaded eggplant slices on both sides until golden brown and crisp. This needs to be done in several batches, adding more oil as needed. Place the browned slices on a large baking sheet.

Place a rack in the upper part of the oven and preheat it to 425°. Bake the eggplant slices for 5-6 minutes, making them even crisper.

For the Eggplant

3 small eggplants, 2½ pounds total
¾ cup flour
3 large eggs
6 ounces panko crumbs
Salt and pepper to taste

To Assemble

1 cup grated Parmigiano
¼ cup chopped fresh basil
½ cup grated Fontina Val d'Aosta

To Assemble

In a 9-inch by 13-inch baking pan, spread a thick layer of the tomato sauce. Arrange a layer of the largest eggplant slices over the tomato sauce. Spread another layer of tomato sauce on top of those eggplant slices. Sprinkle some of the grated Parmigiano over the tomato sauce, then toss some basil on top of that.

Continue with another layer of eggplant, using the next largest slices. Again spread some of the tomato sauce, Parmigiano, and basil on top of those slices. Continue with a third layer, using the next largest slices of eggplant. Continue this process until you've used up all of the eggplant. The smallest slices of eggplant should be on the top. It should finish with about 6 neat and even stacks of eggplant. Spread tomato sauce and basil over the top level of eggplant slices, but no more Parmigiano. Use all of the sauce or the dish tends to be a bit dry.

Grate the Fontina Val d'Aosta cheese on the coarse holes of your grater. Then spread the cheese over the whole top of the dish.

Bake at 425°, again at the upper level of the oven, for about 20 minutes or until thoroughly heated. Place the baking pan under a broiler for just 1 or 2 minutes to lightly brown the top layer of cheese. Check every few seconds because it can burn very easily.

To Serve

Allow the dish to rest for 15-20 minutes. Each person should receive one of the six stacks of eggplant.

Serves 6.