

Eggplant Is Really A Berry

By ELLY
Eggplant is a fruit, actually a berry, which is eaten as a vegetable.

A close relative of the tomato, it shares much of the same shady history -- it took several centuries for northern Europeans to associate both the eggplant and the tomato from their black sheep relation, deadly nightshade.

Both acquired colorful, if inappropriate, nicknames. The tomato was called the "love apple," and the eggplant became the "mad apple."

Fortunately, many cooks ignored or were ignorant of the eggplant's undeserved reputation and continued to enjoy the eggplant's versatility as Indians had for 2,000 years.

The dark purple variety is most common here. Look for cylindrical or pear-shaped ones that are heavy, smooth, firm and of a uniform dark glossy color.

DEEP-FRIED EGGPLANT

1 large eggplant
Salt and pepper to taste
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 egg
2 T. milk or water
1/4 cup fine dry breadcrumbs
Fat for deep frying
Peel eggplant and cut into sticks about 1/2 inch thick. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, roll in flour, then dip into egg beaten with milk. Roll in crumbs and fry in hot deep fat (380 degrees on a frying thermometer) until golden brown. Drain on absorbent paper, and serve at once. Makes six servings.

INDIVIDUAL BAKED EGGPLANT AND CHICKEN

1 large eggplant
Cooking oil (preferably olive oil)
2 T. butter
2 T. all-purpose flour
1 c. milk
Salt and pepper to taste
1 tsp. ground cuminseed
1 T. sherry
1/2 c. grated Romano cheese
3 c. finely minced cooked chicken
1 c. cooked peas
Buttered soft bread crumbs

Remove the eggplant stem. Cut eggplant in six thin slices crosswise from its thicker end. Slice the remaining eggplant thinly lengthwise. Fry all slices in oil on both sides until tender. Drain on absorbent paper. Line six small baking dishes, custard cups or overproof glass cups with the longer slices. Reserve the rounds for later. Chop any remaining slices and set aside. Melt the butter in a saucepan. Add the flour and blend well. Gradually stir in the milk. Season with salt, pepper, cuminseed and sherry. Cook for five minutes over low heat, stirring constantly, until sauce thickens. Add the cheese, chicken, any chopped eggplant and cook for five more minutes. Lastly, add the peas. Carefully spoon into the lined dishes. Sprinkle with breadcrumbs. Top with an eggplant round. Cook in a moderate oven (350 degrees) for 30 minutes. Makes six servings.

BALKAN STUFFED EGGPLANT

2 medium eggplants
2 medium onions, chopped
1 T. butter
1 pound ground lamb
1 beef bouillon cube
1/2 c. hot water
3 T. tomato puree
1/4 c. uncooked rice
1 tsp. crumbled dried oregano
2 T. chopped parsley
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. pepper
1/4 c. soft bread crumbs
1/4 c. tomato sauce

Slice eggplants in half lengthwise. Scoop out insides, leaving a shell one inch thick. Saute the onions in butter until tender. Add the lamb and cook until the meat has lost its redness. Pour off any fat. Dissolve the bouillon cube in hot water and add with the tomato puree to the lamb. Cook for 10 minutes; separate the meat with a fork from time to time. Chop eggplant pulp and add to meat mixture; cook for 10 minutes. Remove from heat and mix in remaining ingredients, except bread crumbs and tomato sauce. Fill eggplant shells with the stuffing dish. Sprinkle lightly with the bread crumbs. Sauté the sauce over the tops. Bake in preheated moderate oven (375 degrees) for 45 to 50 minutes, until the eggplant is tender. Serve hot. Makes four servings.

Use Two Layers

Place two layers of waxed paper or freezer between layers of meat, before freezing. Aids in separation and speeds defrosting.



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