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Sicily's Great Eggplant–Tomato Stew

By Skip Lombardi

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I ran into a friend yesterday, who tells me that he should be harvesting eggplants from his garden any day now. Of course, this got me thinking about Caponata, the famous Sicilian eggplant and tomato stew.

This is a terrific 'contorno', vegetable course, and also a great topping for 'bruschetta', Tuscany's grilled bread. Of course it's one of the quintessential Italian antipasti too. And when you can walk into your own garden and harvest the vegetables to put it together, Caponata becomes all the more magical.

Italians have a particular fondness for 'le primizie', the smallest of the first crop of vegetables. So if you have access to a garden either your own or a friend's or if you can get to a farm stand, now is the time for you to be thinking about caponata too.

The recipe below is excerpted from my first cookbook, "La Cucina dei Poveri."

My Grandmother's Caponata

When the garden was in full swing during the summer, Noonie (my grandmother) would harvest well, more accurately, she would direct Pop (my grandfather) to harvest some eggplant, tomatoes, and peppers for this delicious antipasto that she referred to as 'Caponatina. My recollections fail as to how she served it, but I'm betting that it was over a piece of Italian bread that Pop had fried in olive oil.

Nowadays, I serve it over bruschetta made from some good Tuscan bread which I'm happy to report seems to be turning up more and more frequently at supermarket bakeries.

Ingredients: 4 Tbs. Olive oil 2 Cloves garlic, peeled, and thinly sliced 1 Medium onion, peeled, and chopped 1 Medium eggplant (approximately 1 1/4 Lb.) cut into 1 inch cubes 2 Medium bell peppers 1/4 Lb. Green olives, pits removed 1 Tbs. Capers 1 Cup Italian plum tomatoes, roughly chopped 1/4

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Cup sugar 1/4Cup red wine vinegar 1/2 Cup raisins 2 Tbs. Fresh mint, chopped 1/4 tsp. Red pepper flakes

Preparation:

Heat the olive oil in a sauté pan over medium–high heat, then add the garlic. Sauté until the garlic just begins to give off its aroma perhaps a minute or two. Add the onion and sauté for about five minutes, until it becomes translucent.

Add the eggplant and sauté for about five minutes or until it begins to soften, but still has plenty of texture. Add the peppers, olives, and capers and sauté until the peppers become tender. Add the tomatoes and continue cooking to incorporate the tomatoes with the other ingredients and to begin to form a sauce.

Add the sugar, spreading it evenly over the pan, then the vinegar, raisins, mint, and red pepper flakes. Stir well to blend all the ingredients, then remove from the heat.

Italians typically serve Caponata at room temperature.

Serves four to six.

Skip Lombardi is the author of two cookbooks: "La Cucina dei Poveri: Recipes from my Sicilian Grandparents," and "Almost Italian: Recipes from America's Little Italys." He has been a Broadway musician, high–school math teacher, software engineer, and a fledgeling blogger. But he has never let any of those pursuits get in the way of his passion for cooking and eating. Visit his Web site to learn more about his cookbooks.

or contact Mr. Lombardi at

Two for One Dinners: Eggplant

By Michele Webb

Two for One Dinners: Eggplant by Michele Webb

If you find leftovers boring, uninviting or downright "yuck," then here are some ideas to put the "zing" back into mealtime. With a little creativity your home–cooked meal can easily become a delicious meal another night. There are a six articles in this series, today we are going to look at what you can do with eggplant.

DINNER – NIGHT ONE: Eggplant Parmesan

Layer baked eggplant slices with ricotta and mozzarella cheeses and tomato sauce, then top with a mixture of breadcrumbs and Parmesan cheese for a delicious vegetarian take on comfort food. Best

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when baked in a glass baking dish. Store leftovers, covered tightly, in the glass baking dish. Serve with steamed broccoli and bread twists.

DINNER – NIGHT TWO: Rigatoni with Eggplant Sauce

Up to two nights later, chop the leftover casserole coarsely, then toss it with leftover tomato sauce and mix with cooked rigatoni for a great pasta dish. Serve with a tossed salad and bread (optional).

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Michele Webb owns her own website and is a member of a number of organizations for women Netpreneurs and business owners. She currently lives in Las Vegas, Nevada USA with her two dogs. You are invited to visit her website at: <http://www.ebooksnstuff.com>. Or, you can email the author at: support@ebooksnstuff.com

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