

Fergi's Eggplant Parmesan

(with Mushrooms, Mozzarella, and Capers)

Based on Jamie Oliver's lighter, no-fry method, this recipe layers roasted eggplant with a zesty tomato-caper sauce, earthy mushrooms, and melted mozzarella for a richer, more complex final dish.

Yields: 6-8 servings **Prep time:** 45 minutes **Cook time:** 1 hour 15 minutes

Ingredients:

- **For the Eggplant:**
 - 2 large eggplants, trimmed and sliced lengthwise into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick slices
 - About $\frac{1}{2}$ cup extra virgin olive oil
 - Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- **For the Tomato-Caper Sauce:**
 - 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
 - 1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
 - 2 cloves garlic, minced
 - 1 teaspoon dried oregano
 - 2 (28-ounce) cans crushed tomatoes
 - 2-3 tablespoons capers, rinsed and patted dry
 - Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- **For the Mushrooms:**
 - 10 ounces cremini mushrooms, cleaned and sliced
 - 1 tablespoon olive oil
 - Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- **For Assembly:**
 - 8 ounces fresh mozzarella, sliced or torn
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fresh breadcrumbs or panko
 - Fresh basil leaves, for garnish

Instructions:**1. Roast the Eggplant:**

- Preheat your oven to 400°F (200°C).
- Brush both sides of the eggplant slices generously with olive oil and season with salt and pepper.
- Arrange the slices in a single layer on baking sheets. Roast for 15-20 minutes, flipping halfway, until golden brown and tender. Set aside.

2. Make the Tomato-Caper Sauce:

- While the eggplant roasts, heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until soft, about 5-7 minutes.
- Stir in the minced garlic and oregano and cook for one minute until fragrant.
- Pour in the crushed tomatoes, season with salt and pepper, and bring to a simmer. Reduce heat and cook for at least 20 minutes to allow the flavors to meld.
- Stir in the rinsed capers during the last 10 minutes of simmering.

3. Sauté the Mushrooms:

- While the sauce simmers, heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a separate skillet over medium-high heat.
- Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally, until they have released their liquid and are well-browned, about 8-10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and set aside.

4. Assemble the Casserole:

- Lightly grease a 9x13 inch baking dish. Reduce oven temperature to 375°F (190°C).
- Spread a thin layer of tomato-caper sauce on the bottom of the dish.
- Arrange a single layer of roasted eggplant slices.
- Top with another layer of sauce, followed by a layer of the sautéed mushrooms.
- Distribute half of the mozzarella slices over the mushrooms, then sprinkle with half of the Parmigiano-Reggiano.
- Repeat the layers: eggplant, sauce, mushrooms, mozzarella, and Parmesan.
- Finish with a final layer of sauce, the remaining Parmigiano-Reggiano, and an even layer of breadcrumbs. Drizzle lightly with a bit of olive oil.

5. Bake:

- Bake for 45-50 minutes, or until the sauce is bubbly and the topping is golden brown and crisp.

6. Rest and Serve:

- Let the casserole rest for at least 15 minutes before slicing and serving. This is crucial for it to set properly. Garnish with fresh basil and enjoy.