



Eggplant Involtni

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 15: The Italian Vegetarian

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

Eggplant *involtni* recipes are often just eggplant Parmesan in a more complicated form: fried eggplant, milky cheese filling, and lots of sauce, with a blanket of mozzarella. We wanted a lighter, more summery dish that focused on the eggplant. Baking the eggplant instead of frying it allows us to skip the salting and draining step, since the eggplant's excess moisture evaporates in the oven, and it means that the eggplant's flavor and meaty texture are not obscured by oil and breading. Swapping the usual ricotta-heavy filling for one that's boosted with a generous dose of Pecorino Romano means we can use less filling without sacrificing flavor. Lastly, we make a simple but complementary tomato sauce in a skillet, add the eggplant bundles to it, and finish it under the broiler, which decreases the number of dishes required.

Serves 4 to 6

Select shorter, wider eggplants for this recipe. Part-skim ricotta may be used, but do not use fat-free ricotta. Serve the eggplant with crusty bread and a salad.

INGREDIENTS

- 2** large eggplants (1 1/2 pounds each), peeled
- 6** tablespoons vegetable oil
- Kosher salt and pepper
- 2** garlic cloves, minced
- 1/4** teaspoon dried oregano
- Pinch red pepper flakes
- 1** (28-ounce) can whole peeled tomatoes, drained with juice reserved, chopped coarse
- 1** slice hearty white sandwich bread, torn into 1-inch pieces
- 8** ounces (1 cup) whole-milk ricotta cheese
- 1 1/2** ounces grated Pecorino Romano cheese (3/4 cup)
- 1/4** cup plus 1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil
- 1** tablespoon lemon juice

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Slice each eggplant lengthwise into 1/2-inch-thick planks (you should have 12 planks). Trim rounded surface from each end piece so it lies flat.

2. Adjust 1 oven rack to lower-middle position and second rack 8 inches from broiler element. Heat oven to 375 degrees. Line 2 rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper and spray generously with vegetable oil spray. Arrange eggplant slices in single layer on prepared sheets. Brush 1 side of eggplant slices with 2 1/2 tablespoons oil and

sprinkle with 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Flip eggplant slices and brush with 2 1/2 tablespoons oil and sprinkle with 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Bake until tender and lightly browned, 30 to 35 minutes, switching and rotating sheets halfway through baking. Let cool for 5 minutes. Using thin spatula, flip each slice over. Heat broiler.

3. While eggplant cooks, heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch broiler-safe skillet over medium-low heat until just shimmering. Add garlic, oregano, pepper flakes, and 1/2 teaspoon salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in tomatoes and their juice. Increase heat to high and bring to simmer. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until thickened, about 15 minutes. Cover and set aside.

4. Pulse bread in food processor until finely ground, 10 to 15 pulses. Combine bread crumbs, ricotta, 1/2 cup Pecorino, 1/4 cup basil, lemon juice, and 1/2 teaspoon salt in medium bowl.

5. With widest ends of eggplant slices facing you, evenly distribute ricotta mixture on bottom third of each slice. Gently roll up each eggplant slice and place seam side down in tomato sauce.

6. Bring sauce to simmer over medium heat. Simmer for 5 minutes. Transfer skillet to oven and broil until eggplant is well browned and cheese is heated through, 5 to 10 minutes. Sprinkle with remaining 1/4 cup Pecorino and let stand for 5 minutes. Sprinkle with remaining 1 tablespoon basil and serve.

TECHNIQUE

BAKE, DON'T FRY

We trade the salting, breading, and frying steps that classic recipes employ for a lighter, no-fuss approach.

1. SLICE: Lay each peeled eggplant on its side and slice it lengthwise into 1/2-inch-thick planks (you should have 12 planks).



2. BAKE: Brush both sides of slices with oil, season with salt and pepper, and bake until tender and lightly browned, about 30 minutes.



3. STUFF AND ROLL: With widest end facing you, place portion of ricotta mixture on bottom third of slice. Roll into cylinder.



TECHNIQUE

BREAD CRUMBS: OUTSIDE TO INSIDE

In most involtini recipes bread crumbs are used to coat the eggplant, but in our version we put them in the cheese. The bread crumbs keep the filling creamy by preventing the Pecorino Romano proteins from linking tightly.

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT



wear-Ever Hair Size Heavy Duty...



Cuisinart Custom 14-Cup Food...



Microplane Classic Zester Grater...



OXO Good Grips Silicone Pastry...



All-Clad 12-Inch Stainless Fry...