

Caponata with Grapes & Pine nuts

Ingredients:

1 kilo (2 lbs.) eggplant, cut into small cubes
1 bunch of celery, cut into bite-sized pieces
1 large onion, thinly sliced
1 small can of tomatoes or 250g (1/2 lb) fresh, skinned and seeded
Salt and pepper
A handful of capers
A handful of pignoli nuts
250g (1/2 lb.) of green olives, pitted and halved
1 cup seedless green grapes, halved
A sprig of fresh marjoram
1tsp sicilian oregano
Olive oil
Red wine vinegar & sugar, to taste

Directions:

Optional: needed for larger, more mature eggplant. Remove the excess liquid from the eggplant by sprinkling the eggplant cubes with salt and placing them in a colander, with a small plate on top to exert some gentle pressure and one below to catch the eggplant liquid as it drains. Let the eggplant steep for an hour or more.

Step 1

Gather up a handful of eggplant with a paper towel, give it a gentle squeeze to dry the cubes, and throw them into abundant olive oil—about 1 cm (1/2 in) deep—in a large pot. (Enameled cast iron pots work particularly well.) Work in batches to avoid crowding the eggplant, removing them with a skimmer when the eggplant cubes are just lightly browned to a basket or bowl lined with paper towels to soak up the excess oil.

Step 2

When all your eggplant is done, there should be less oil in the pan, but still enough to cook with. Add the celery, sauté for a few minutes until the celery is tender but still has some 'bite' left in it. Season with salt and pepper as it cooks. Remove with a skimmer and set aside.

Step 3

Now add the onion to the remaining oil in the pot and sauté it gently until it is quite soft. Add the tomato. Simmer the tomato until it has melted and reduced to a nice, sauce-like consistency.

Step 4

Now add back your eggplant and celery, along with the capers, pine nuts, olives, grapes and the marjoram. Allow everything to simmer together for about 5-10 minutes. A minute or two before it's done, add the sugar and vinegar, mix well (but gently!) and let it finish simmering. Turn off the heat and let the dish cool entirely before serving.

THE COOKERY

by The Secret Jozi Chef

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