

MELANZANE PARMIGIANA

This lovely aubergine dish can be served as lunch with some crusty bread, or as a side dish to accompany some griddled chicken or a barbecue. There are many different recipes, and this is one that I have cobbled together from a mix of sources, with my own little tweaks added.

INGREDIENTS – SERVES 6 AS A SIDE DISH

2 large or 3 medium aubergines	1 tsp red wine vinegar
2 tbsp olive oil	salt and pepper
1 onion chopped	1 handful basil
1 clove garlic	400 gm grated parmesan
2 tsp fresh oregano or 1 tsp dried	750 gm mozzarella - buffalo if possible
2 400 gm tins tinned tomatoes *	Fresh breadcrumbs (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

Heat oven to 190 (fan)

Slice aubergines about 1 cm thick. Get griddle pan really hot and brush the aubergines lightly with oil. Put 1 tbsp olive oil into a saucepan and add the onion and garlic. Cook for about 10 minutes until onion is soft but not coloured. Add tomatoes and oregano and simmer for about 15 minutes until thickened. If using tinned tomatoes (see note), chop these with a wooden spoon as they cook.

Grill the aubergines on both sides until charred.

Season the tomato sauce with plenty of black pepper and a little salt (the parmesan is salty – so beware) add the wine vinegar and the basil, torn.

Slice the mozzarella as thinly as possible.

Put a thin layer of the tomato sauce on the bottom of a ceramic dish measuring about 30 x 30 (or equivalent oblong), followed by a layer of aubergines, dot with a little more sauce, mozzarella, then parmesan. Continue until all used up, finishing with the mozzarella and parmesan.

If you would like a crispy top, add a scattering of fresh breadcrumbs (see tip, below). You can also add some additional fresh oregano and salt and pepper to the crumbs.

Cook for about 30 minutes. The top should be golden. Leave for about 10 minutes before eating (unless you want to burn your tongue!).

* I don't use tinned tomatoes for this – I use my own home made tomato sauce. You might want to substitute the tinned tomatoes for a couple of jars of plain tomato pasta sauce. If you are using tinned tomatoes, I would recommend buying the best possible tomatoes – not chopped tomatoes (you can chop them up yourself) and add a heaped teaspoon of vegetable stock powder (such as Swiss Marigold).

TIP: Making fresh breadcrumbs each time you need them is an unnecessary task. Each time you have a bit of bread left over, some crusts that you have cut off a loaf for a dish, or just some day old ciabatta that you are going to throw away, put it into the liquidizer or food processor and make it into crumbs. Put into a plastic bag in the freezer – and add to it whenever you have some more. Then, each time you need breadcrumbs for a topping, just grab a handful and scatter!