

Sweet-and-Sour Eggplant

GOURMET MAY 2005

Yield Makes about 1 quart, or 10 servings

Ingredients

2 lb eggplant (preferably small but not Asian)

2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon coarse sea salt

2 1/4 to 2 1/2 cups olive oil

11 garlic cloves (from 2 heads), chopped

2 tablespoons tomato paste

1 (28-oz) can whole Italian tomatoes, finely chopped and juice reserved

5 celery ribs, cut into 1/2-inch pieces

1 large onion, chopped

1 large red or yellow pepper, cut into 1/2-inch pieces

1 cup large green Sicilian olives (6 oz), pitted and cut into 1/4-inch pieces

1/4 cup drained bottled capers, rinsed

1/3 cup red-wine vinegar

1/4 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon black pepper

1/4 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1/4 cup chopped fresh basil

Special equipment: a deep-fat thermometer

Preparation

Cut eggplant into 1/2-inch cubes and transfer to a colander. Toss with 2 tablespoons sea salt. Let drain 1 hour.

While eggplant drains, heat 2 tablespoons oil in a 4- to 5-quart heavy pot over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking, then sauté three fourths of garlic, stirring, until golden, about 1 minute. Add tomato paste and cook, stirring, 1 minute. Add tomatoes with their juice, then reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until thickened, 20 to 25 minutes.

Bring 3 cups salted water to a boil in a 1- to 1 1/2-quart saucepan, then cook celery until tender, 5 to 7 minutes. Drain in a colander and rinse under cold water to stop cooking.

Gently squeeze eggplant to remove excess moisture and pat dry. Heat 1/4 inch oil (about 2 cups) in a 12-inch heavy skillet over moderately high heat until it registers 360°F on thermometer, then fry eggplant in 4 batches, stirring and turning constantly with a slotted spoon, until browned and tender, 3 to 5 minutes per batch. (Return oil to 360°F between batches.) Transfer to paper towels. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons oil from skillet, then reduce heat to moderate and cook onion, bell pepper, and remaining garlic, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 10 minutes. Add tomato sauce, eggplant, celery, olives, capers, vinegar, sugar, pepper, and remaining teaspoon sea salt and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, 15 minutes. Cool to room temperature, uncovered, then chill, covered, at least 8 hours.

Just before serving, stir in parsley and basil. Serve cold or at room temperature.