

BUONA DOMENICA

Melanzane Ripiene Castelvetro

Even with pithy (and I don't mean clever) supermarket eggplants, this dish was fantastic, rich with herbal flavor and brightened with a spritz of fresh orange and lime juice. Here's what food historian Karima, Moyer-Nocchi, who adapted the recipe from a 17th Century recipe by Giacomo Castelvetro, says: "The flavor balance of aromatic herbs, sour citrus, garlic and pungent cheese, mediated by the bread and nestled onto a buttery eggplant base is simply heaven."

I served the eggplant as a side dish to grilled pork chops, but it would go with many dishes: roast chicken, sausages, frittata, shrimp or swordfish skewers, grilled scamorza. You get the picture.

Makes 4 servings

INGREDIENTS

4 smallish eggplants, about 900 g (2 lb) total

2 to 3 thick slices dryish bread (not fully dried), crumbed; about about 100g (3 1/2 ounces) or 2 lightly packed cups

About 5 cups mixed fresh herbs (75 g); 30 g each fresh flat-leaf parsley and basil, plus 15 g total marjoram and thyme (I added some fresh oregano to the mix since my garden is already producing it)

1 clove garlic, minced

1 cup (80g) grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Juice of 1 bitter orange or of half a sweet orange and half a large lime

1 teaspoon salt, or to taste

1 egg, lightly beaten

Extra-virgin olive oil

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350° F (180° C). Slice the eggplants in half lengthwise; you can either leave the tops on and slice through the stems or slice the stems off first. Hollow out the halves—I used a melon baller—leaving just a little flesh behind.

2. Chop the eggplant flesh finely and place it in a bowl. Add the breadcrumbs. Finely chop the herbs and mince the garlic and add them to the bread. Stir in the Parmigiano cheese and citrus

juice, and season with salt. Taste and add more if needed. Fold in the egg, along with a drizzle of olive oil

3. Brush a little olive oil into the eggplant hollows and sprinkle with a tiny bit of salt. Spoon in the filling; you should have enough to fill each shell completely. Arrange them on a parchment-lined baking sheet and drizzle a little olive oil over the tops (optional). Bake, uncovered, for 30 minutes; then cover with foil and bake another 20 to 30 minutes, until the eggplant is completely tender but still holds its shape. Cool for 10 minutes and serve.