

Eggplant Parmesan

This recipe gets easier as you make it over time. If you are new to this dish or this recipe, my advice is to give yourself a couple of hours so you can enjoy each step of the process. It takes time, and it's a labor of love, but with great rewards when your family and friends appreciate the dining experience. I love to serve this with a light Caesar salad and garlic bread.

I have broken down the four big preparation steps.

Preparing the eggplant

Making the marinara sauce

Getting your cheeses ready

Building the dish

Preparing the eggplant

1. I keep the skin on my slices, but you can remove it if you do not prefer the skin.
2. Arrange the eggplant slices on several baking sheets and sprinkle generously all over with kosher salt (both sides). Set aside to let the bitter juices weep from the eggplant, about 1 hour. Do not skimp the time here.
3. Transfer the eggplant to a colander in the sink, and rinse well under cold running water. Transfer eggplant to a work surface and blot **very dry** with paper towels.
4. I use three pie plates for this step.

In one plate I added Italian seasoned bread crumbs. I have also used Panko crumbs but prefer seasoned breadcrumbs.

In the second plate I whisk the egg and milk together.

In the third plate I have flour with a pinch of salt and pepper.

5. Dredge an eggplant slice in the flour, then dip it in the egg, and finally dredge it in the breadcrumb mixture. Shake off any excess breading and transfer the eggplant to a baking sheet. Repeat with the remaining eggplant.

NOTE: I now place these baking sheets in the frig for about an hour. I learned this step from my son when he was in culinary school and even though it adds time, I like the result.

TIP: When your slices are cooling in the refrigerator, make the Marinara Sauce.

6. In a large straight-sided skillet, pour the oil to a depth of 1/2 inch. Heat the oil over medium heat until it registers 400 degrees F on a deep-frying thermometer. (The oil must be heated to 400 degrees F. so that the breaded eggplant, when added, will drop the temperature of the oil to the proper frying temperature of 375 degrees F.)
7. Working in small batches, fry the eggplant slices, turning once, until golden brown, about 3 minutes per batch. Using tongs, transfer to a drying rack or use a paper towel-lined baking sheet. At this step you can salt and pepper to taste. Repeat with the remaining eggplant.

Ingredients

2 medium eggplant (about 2 1/4 pounds), cut into 1/4 to 1/2 inch-thick round slices.

Kosher salt, as needed, plus 1 tablespoon

5 cups fresh Italian seasoned breadcrumbs

Freshly ground black pepper

Olive oil for frying (heating olive oil for frying is not typically recommended and it is a little heavier in terms of the richness of the dish but for me, it is the historical taste that makes this my go to, but I have also used Avocado oil. You can use any oil you prefer or available in your pantry.

All-purpose flour for dredging

6 large eggs, beaten

2 tablespoons whole milk

Olive oil, as needed

7 cups Marinara Sauce, recipe follows

2/3 cup grated Parmesan, divided

1 pound fresh provolone, thinly sliced

Making the Marinara Sauce

If you do not have time to make your sauce from scratch, you can substitute it for your favorite store-bought marinara sauce.

1. Heat the oil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat.
2. Saute the onion and garlic, stirring, until lightly browned, about 3 minutes. Be careful not to burn the garlic.
3. Add the tomatoes and the herb sprigs and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer, covered, for 10 minutes. If you have time, let it simmer for 30 minutes.

NOTE: I like my sauce smooth without any onion or tomato pieces so after the sauce is done I use an immersion blender to remove any bits or pieces.

Ingredients:

3 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

½ diced onion (about 1/3 cup)

5 cloves garlic (chopped)

7 cups whole, peeled canned tomatoes in puree (about 2 28-ounce cans). I prefer the Cento brand if available.

2 sprigs fresh thyme

2 sprigs fresh basil

1 Tbsp kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Getting the cheeses ready

I like to make sure my cheese is all set out ahead of time, because by the time you are ready to build your dish, you will not want to stop and grate your cheese or remove the paper between the slices.

You will need two type of cheese.

Sliced Provolone cheese (I prefer this over mozzarella, but it up to you)

Grated fresh Parmesan. (I prefer to grate my own parmesan, but again, up to you)

Building the dish

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Lightly brush a 15 x 10- x 2-inch-baking dish with olive oil. Cover the bottom of the baking dish with 1/3 of the marinara sauce and arrange half of the eggplant over the sauce. Cover the eggplant with another 1/3 of the sauce. Scatter half of the Parmesan and half of the mozzarella over the sauced eggplant. Repeat with the remaining eggplant, sauce, Parmesan, and mozzarella. Bake until hot and just beginning to brown, about 30 minutes. Serve immediately.

Bon Appetite