

Eggplant Pasta Bake

Recipe by Libby Stigaard Ilson

<http://www.allergickid.blogspot.com>

Sauce:

2 Tbs olive oil
1 onion, chopped
4 oz mushrooms, sliced
1-2 cloves garlic, crushed
2 Tbs mixed Italian herbs
29 oz can tomato puree
15 oz can diced tomatoes
salt and pepper to taste

Eggplant:

1 medium eggplant
kosher salt
2 Tbs olive oil

Additional Ingredients:

8 oz pasta (i.e. rigate) cooked al dente
2 C packed spinach leaves
1 C daiya mozzarella style shreds

Topping:

3-4 slices bread or 1 C breadcrumbs
1 C daiya mozzarella style shreds
1 Tbs olive oil
2 tsp dried oregano
1/2 tsp garlic powder
1/2 tsp salt

Slice eggplant into 1/2" thick rounds, then peel. Sprinkle with kosher salt and layer in a colander. Allow to sweat for 30 minutes to reduce bitterness.

While eggplant drips away, make the sauce. Heat 2 Tbs olive oil in a medium pan. Add onion and cook until translucent. Stir in mushroom and cook until soft. Mix in Italian seasoning and garlic, then add both pureed and diced tomatoes, including liquid. Add salt and pepper to taste, then reduce heat to low and allow to simmer while continuing prep.

Preheat oven to 375°F and start pasta water boiling. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil,

preferably the easy release type. Rinse off eggplant and dry with a paper towel. Slice rounds into 1/2" wide sticks.

Dump the eggplant sticks onto the baking sheet, drizzle them with olive oil, toss with fingers, then spread in a single layer on the sheet. Bake for 25 minutes.

Cook the pasta according to package directions and drain. Place all of the topping ingredients in a food processor and puree until both bread and daiya are a uniform large breadcrumb size. Remove eggplant from oven when done, reduce oven temperature to 350°F and begin assembly in a 9"x13" pan.

For the first layer, just barely cover the bottom of the pan with sauce. Evenly spread out half of the pasta, then all of the eggplant on top of it. Sprinkle eggplant with remaining cup daiya shreds, then cover with spinach. Spread one third of remaining sauce over spinach, then layer remaining pasta on top it. Carefully spread remaining sauce, being sure to completely cover pasta, then gently sprinkle topping over sauce.

Flip over aluminum foil from the baking sheet and cover the pan. Bake covered for 30 minutes, then remove foil and bake for another 15. Remove pan from oven and allow to set for 15 minutes before serving.