

BAKED EGGPLANT SICILIAN STYLE

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From Trattoria Cooking: At Trattoria La Bussola in Mazzaro, a very small community just outside Taormina in Sicilia, they bread and fry the eggplant slices, combine them with a lightly cooked tomato sauce and mozzarella, and bake the preparation just long enough for the cheese to melt. The result is a very satisfying yet fresh-tasting dish.

1 medium eggplant, trimmed, peeled and cut length-wise into twelve 1/4 inch slices
1-2 TBS salt
2 large eggs, lightly beaten in a medium-size bowl
2 cups plain bread crumbs, spread on a sheet of foil
Vegetable oil for frying
1/4 cup olive oil
3 cloves garlic, minced or pressed
4 cups Italian tomatoes with their juices, strained to remove the seeds
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
2 TBS fresh parsley, chopped
24 thin slices mozzarella (approximately 12 ounces)

Put the eggplant slices on a large platter or baking sheet, sprinkle with the salt and let stand for about one hour. Rinse the eggplant slices thoroughly and pat dry with paper towels.

Dip the slices in the beaten eggs, shake off the excess and dredge to completely cover in the bread crumbs. Heat one inch of vegetable oil in a medium-size skillet over high heat. When the oil is very hot, slip a few of the breaded eggplant slices into the oil. When they are golden (less than one minute), turn and brown on the other side. With a slotted spoon, transfer the slices to paper towels to drain. Repeat with the remaining eggplant. (This step can be done a few hours ahead. Keep the fried eggplant at room temperature.)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Heat the olive oil in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, until the garlic begins to color, less than one minute. Add the tomatoes and season with salt and pepper. Cook, uncovered, 7 to 8 minutes. Just before removing the tomato mixture from the heat, stir in the parsley.

Spread about 3/4 cup of the sauce in the bottom of a baking dish. Cover the sauce with eggplant slices and top each with two slices of mozzarella. Spread some more of the tomato sauce over them and repeat until all of the ingredients are used up. (If you are using a small baking dish, you might have two or three layers. If you are using a large dish, you may have only one layer.) Bake until the cheese is melted, 12 to 15 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature. 4-6 servings.