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Oven-Baked Eggplant Risotto

From Julie Biuso's book - Viva l'italia - ISBN 1 877246 87 5 - New Holland Publishers (NZ) Ltd

Serves 4 people

2 medium-large eggplants (aubergines) about 250g each
250ml (1 cup) olive oil for frying
750ml (3 cups) light chicken stock
2 tablespoons olive oil
30gm butter, plus a little extra
1 small onion, finely chopped
2 cloves of garlic, crushed
400g can Italian tomatoes, mashed
2 tablespoons finely chopped basil
1.2 teaspoon of salt
Fresh ground black pepper to taste
250g (1 well-packed cup) Italian rice – Arborio, vialone, nano, carnaroli etc
125ml (1.2 cup) dry white wine
50g (1/2 cup freshly grated parmesan (parmigiano reggiano) cheese
150g mozzarella 'bocconcini' in whey, drained and cubed



Slice the eggplants into large rounds about 5mm thick. Heat the frying oil in a large pan until it is hot and lightly smoking. Put in several slices of eggplant and cook until they are golden brown. Turn with tongs and cook the other side. Drain on absorbent kitchen paper. Repeat with the remaining eggplant slices. Alternatively for a less oily result you can oven-bake instead. Brush both sides of eggplant slices with oil, then lay flat on the baking tray lined with a Teflon baking sheet. Bake for about 20mins, or until tender and brown, in an oven pre-heated to 180 degrees.

Make the risotto next. Bring the stock to a simmer, then set the heat so that it is kept very hot, but does not boil and evaporate. Put the olive oil and half the butter in a heavy-based saucepan over a medium heat, add the onion and garlic and sauté until a pale golden colour. Tip in the tomatoes and the basil, salt & pepper. Cook gently, uncovered, for 10 minutes, then pour all but ½ cup of the mixture into a bowl and set aside.

Add the rice to the tomato mixture in the pan. Increase the temperature to medium-high and stir for 2-3 minutes. Pour in the wine and cook, stirring, until it has nearly evaporated. Start adding the stock slowly a ladleful at the time, stirring all the while until the rice is three-quarters cooked.

Layer the ingredients in a greased ovenproof dish (about 16-18cm diameter and 8-9cm deep) in this order:- rice, parmesan cheese, eggplant slices, tomato mixture and mozzarella. Finish with a top layer of rice, then parmesan cheese.

The dish can be prepared ahead to this point, refrigerated, then cooked when required, but it must be brought to room temperature before cooking.

Dot the top with butter and bake in an oven preheated to 200 degrees for about 15-20 minutes until it is crisp on the top and heated through. Allow to stand for 5 minutes before serving.