

Pasta with Roasted Eggplant and Meat Sauce

April 23, 2019 Mark Bittman Makes 4 servings Time About 1 hour, largely unattended

Roasting this nicely seasoned eggplant-and-lamb sauce from start to finish gives it an incredibly rich flavor while requiring very little attention. The result is something like an eggplant Bolognese, perfect with a little pasta but also good spooned over a split baked potato or even a roll, like a sloppy joe.

INGREDIENTS

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds eggplant, cut into small cubes
8 ounces ground beef or lamb
1 onion, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon roughly chopped garlic
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil
Salt and black pepper
1 bay leaf
1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano, or 1 teaspoon dried
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme, or 1 teaspoon dried
3 tablespoons tomato paste
6 ripe Roma (plum) tomatoes, chopped (canned are fine; drain them first)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dry red wine or water
8 ounces any pasta, preferably whole wheat
Chopped fresh parsley, for garnish, optional
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese, optional

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oven to 425. Put the eggplant, ground meat, onion, and garlic in a large roasting pan. Drizzle with the olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast, stirring occasionally and breaking up the meat, until everything is nicely browned and almost crisp, about 40 minutes.
2. Add the bay leaf, oregano, and thyme, then add the tomato paste and stir to mix it with the vegetables and meat. Stir in the tomatoes and wine and scrape up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Continue roasting until the mixture is thickened, 10 to 15 minutes more. (The sauce can be made ahead to this point. Cool, cover, and refrigerate for up to a few days or freeze for up to a few months. Gently reheat it before proceeding.)
3. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and salt it. When the sauce is ready, cook the pasta in the boiling water until it's tender but not mushy; drain it, reserving some of the cooking water. Remove the pan from the oven. Discard the bay leaf. Add enough of the cooking water to the sauce to loosen any browned bits from the bottom of the pan and moisten the pasta. Add the pasta and toss. Stir in the parsley and Parmesan if you're using them. Serve.

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