

Italian Baked Eggplant Casserole

Pasticcio di Melanzane

Prep Time	20 minutes
Resting Time	30 minutes
Cook Time	45 minutes
Total Time	1 hour 35 minutes
Servings	4

Ingredients

- 3 medium eggplants, about 2-2 1/2 lb (900 g-1.1 kg)
- Salt, as needed for draining the eggplant
- About 1/2 cup (60 g) all-purpose flour, or as needed for coating
- Extra virgin olive oil, as needed for frying
- 2 large eggs
- 2/3 cup (150 ml) whole milk
- 2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh Italian parsley
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 7 oz (200 g) fresh mozzarella, well drained and sliced
- 3 1/2 oz (100 g) thinly sliced mortadella

Optional Substitution

Instead of mortadella, use the same amount of thinly sliced cooked ham (prosciutto cotto).

Instructions

1. Prepare the Eggplant

Wash and trim the eggplants. Cut them lengthwise into thin strips, approximately 1/4 inch (5-6 mm) thick. Arrange them in layers in a colander, sprinkling each layer lightly with salt. Place a plate or small weight over the eggplant and let it drain for about 30 minutes.

2. Make the Egg Mixture

Crack the eggs into a medium bowl. Add the milk, Parmigiano Reggiano, chopped parsley, a small pinch of salt, and freshly ground black pepper. Whisk until well combined and set aside.

3. Flour the Eggplant

After 30 minutes, gently squeeze or pat the eggplant slices dry with paper towels. Lightly coat each piece with all-purpose flour and shake off the excess.

4. Fry the Eggplant

Heat about 1/4 inch of extra virgin olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, fry the eggplant until lightly golden on both sides. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate and continue until all the eggplant is cooked.

5. Assemble the Casserole

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Lightly grease an approximately 8-inch (20 cm) baking dish. Arrange the fried eggplant over the bottom, overlapping the pieces slightly. Add the sliced mortadella, then the sliced mozzarella. Slowly pour the egg-and-milk mixture evenly over the casserole so it runs between the layers.

6. Bake

Bake for about 30 minutes, or until the egg mixture is fully set and the top is golden. For extra browning, place the casserole under the broiler for 1-2 minutes at the end, watching carefully.

7. Rest and Serve

Remove from the oven and let the casserole rest for 10 minutes before cutting. Serve warm, ideally with crusty Italian bread.

Nonna's Tips

- **Drain the mozzarella well.** Fresh mozzarella contains a lot of liquid, so slice it ahead and let it drain before assembling the casserole.
- **Do not skip draining the eggplant.** Salting helps remove excess moisture and improves the texture.
- **Do not over-flour.** The eggplant needs only a very light dusting of flour.
- **Mortadella makes the difference.** For a milder version, substitute prosciutto cotto or good-quality deli ham.
- **Let it rest before cutting.** Ten minutes out of the oven helps the layers set while keeping the mozzarella soft and creamy.

Lighter Baked Eggplant Option

Instead of frying, brush the eggplant slices lightly with olive oil and arrange them on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake at 425°F (220°C) for 15-20 minutes, turning once, until tender and lightly golden. Assemble and bake the casserole as directed above.

Storage

Store leftovers in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. Reheat individual portions in the microwave or warm the casserole in a 350°F (180°C) oven. The casserole can also be frozen, once fully cooled, for up to 2 months. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator before reheating.

Nutrition Facts

Nutrient	Per Serving
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Calories	470 kcal
Protein	21 g
Carbohydrates	28 g
Fat	31 g
Saturated Fat	12 g
Fiber	7 g
Sugar	10 g
Sodium	850 mg

Nutrition values are estimates and may vary depending on ingredients and the amount of oil absorbed during frying.