

A Little Eggplant Parm

Serves 2

The first time I made this, I texted several friends that I had “just made one of the more delicious things I’ve ever made in my life,” a text I send maybe once a year, if that. Anyway, no the eggplant does **not** need to be salted, no we **will not be frying** the eggplant. Yes, it does basically taste like eggplant parmesan but lighter, fresher, tangier, crunchier. If you don’t care for capers, you can skip them, just know you are, in fact, missing out.

PLEASE NOTE: Unless you are doubling this recipe (which you can easily do), you are only using half the tomato sauce here. Save the rest by freezing it, or just pop it in the fridge to eat over pasta later in the week.

1 large globe eggplant (about 2 pounds), sliced about ½”-¾” thick

½ cup olive oil, divided

Kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper

1 small onion (yellow, white, or red), thinly sliced

4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

Crushed red pepper flakes (optional)

4 anchovy fillets (optional), plus more if you want

1 28 oz. can whole San Marzano tomatoes, crushed

¾ cup panko bread crumbs

⅓ cup (about) grated parmesan

2–3 tablespoons capers, coarsely chopped

2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano or marjoram (you can skip, or use half the amount of dried)

⅓ cup coarsely chopped parsley, divided

8 oz. fresh mozzarella, thinly sliced or torn

1. Roast the eggplant. Preheat oven to 450°. Drizzle eggplant with about half the olive oil and season with salt and pepper and roast, turning eggplant halfway through (I use tongs or a fork), until it’s as tender as custard and both sides are as brown as if they were fried (they weren’t), 25–30 minutes.

A lot of the flavor in this dish will come from the eggplant being very very browned, so please don’t be scared to “take it there” so to speak. Please take it there. Take it very there.

2. While that happens, make the sauce. Heat two tablespoons of olive oil in a medium pot over medium-high heat. Add onion and garlic, season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring every now and then until the onions and garlic are tender and starting to brown around the edges, 8–10 minutes. Add crushed red pepper flakes and anchovies, if using, and stir, letting both things melt into the onions. Pour the juices from the tomatoes into the pot and one by one, crush the tomatoes with your hands into the pot (I like to keep the tomatoes on the chunkier side for more texture in the finished dish). Season again with salt and pepper and let it simmer gently for 15–30 minutes (you want to evaporate some but not all of the liquid). Once it tastes very good and feels nicely thickened, remove from heat. Set half aside and freeze or refrigerate the rest.

3. The last annoying thing to do here is to toast the bread crumbs (less annoying than frying though, right?). Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil in a small to medium skillet over medium heat. Add the bread crumbs and season with salt and pepper. Stir them to coat evenly in the oil and toast, tossing frequently, until all the bread crumbs are the color of your morning toast, 5–7 minutes. Remove from heat.

4. Okay, it's time to assemble this thing! How thrilling. There's not a ton of technique here, but here's how I do it to most closely mimic the classique eggplant parm.

5. Spoon about half of the tomato sauce on the bottom of a 1 qt. baking dish or 6" skillet (both hold about 4 cups volume, that's the size you want. Doesn't matter the shape, as long as its heatproof).

6. Top with half the eggplant (a little overlap is fine, so are gaps- don't fuss!). Top with half the parmesan, parsley, capers, and oregano. Scatter half the bread crumbs in a nice even layer on top of all that, followed by half the mozzarella. Repeat this, ending with the mozzarella. Add a little more parmesan if you feel like it, maybe some black pepper.

I feel that this is truly perfect as-is, but if you love anchovies as much as my friend Chris, you can use more to layer in (I'd add a few fillets with the capers/herbs).

7. Now, bake it. Pop it into the oven until the cheese is browned and everything is bubbling around the edges, 15–20 minutes. Remove from the oven, maybe finish with some more parsley if you've got it stuck to your cutting board, and let it cool ever so slightly before eating. I like to just serve it by scooping with a spoon—it's not really meant to be sliced.