

Baingain Bharta (Spicy Indian Eggplant)

Serves 4

This beautiful, warming Punjabi eggplant dish is a true gift from Northern Indian cuisine. Smoky eggplant and spicy green chiles sing when simmered in a stew of juicy tomatoes and caramelized onion. Bright peas and toasty spices make it a perfectly satisfying fall meal.

Ingredients:

2 large eggplants
2 green chiles
8 cloves garlic
1 tablespoon butter
3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
2 medium onions, diced
2 teaspoons garam masala
1/2 teaspoon cumin seeds:
1/2 teaspoon turmeric
1/4 teaspoon cayenne

1-1/2" fresh ginger root, finely grated
5 small tomatoes, diced
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1 cup frozen peas, thawed

For Serving and Garnishing:

2 cups cooked jasmine rice, for serving
Fresh cilantro leaves
1 lemon, sliced

Directions:

1. Rinse and dry the eggplant and green chiles. Make 4 slits in each of the eggplants' skin and insert the garlic cloves, securing them firmly in place. Heat the eggplant and green chiles over an open flame until charred and beginning to collapse. Turning with tongs often to ensure an even char, about 10-15 minutes.
2. Transfer the green chiles and eggplant to a large glass bowl and seal with plastic wrap. Let rest for 10 minutes. When cooled, remove the eggplant from the bowl. Remove the garlic from the eggplant, finely mince, and set aside. Use your hands to remove the eggplant and green chile skins and use a fork to mash the eggplant into a pulpy consistency. Chop the green chiles, remove the seeds, and set aside.
(To bake instead of char, halve the eggplant and lay cut side down, making slits and inserting the garlic the same way. Bake the eggplant and green chiles in the oven at 400°F on a foil-lined baking dish for 30 minutes until soft. Let cool and scoop out the eggplant flesh with a spoon, discarding the skin. Remove the green chile skin and discard. Chop the eggplant and the green chiles and set aside.)
3. Melt the butter in a skillet over medium low heat. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil and the diced onion; cook slowly for about 20 minutes until the onions begin to brown and caramelize, stirring occasionally to keep them from sticking.
4. In a separate, large sauté pan or Dutch oven, toast the spices over medium -ow heat by adding the garam masala, cumin, turmeric, and cayenne; cook for 2-3 minutes, stirring often. Spices should begin to smell fragrant. Add remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, grated ginger, and the chopped garlic to the spices. Turn the heat to medium and continue to cook for 2 more minutes. Add the tomatoes, salt, and pepper and cook for another 5 minutes until the tomatoes become softened.
5. Add the eggplant, chiles, and caramelized onion to the tomato mixture and cook for 3-4 minutes over medium heat until flavors begin to meld. Add the peas and cook for an additional minute.
6. Season the eggplant dish with additional salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with cilantro and lemon, and serve over freshly cooked jasmine rice.