

Eric Guido's Grandmother's Eggplant Parmigiana

Serves 5 - 6

2 medium-size eggplants
Salt and pepper to taste
2 cups flour
4 eggs
2 cups fresh breadcrumbs (go to a local bakery for these if not available in your supermarket)
2 tsp dried oregano
2 tsp dried basil
1 tsp garlic granules
1/2 tsp cracked pepper
1/2 tsp salt
Light olive oil (enough for frying; be prepared to change the oil at least once)
8 ounces of Parmigiano Reggiano (grated)
16 ounces of mozzarella (shredded)
6 cups tomato sauce (a simply tomato sauce will do; I like to go for a chunky style with a little basil)

Peel and slice the eggplant. (Each slice should be about 1/8 of an inch.) Lay the slices out on a rack or sheet pan lined with paper towels and sprinkle heavily with salt. Then flip the slices and sprinkle the other side with salt as well. Allow the eggplant to sit like this for one hour. The salt will pull bitter juices out of the eggplant. When one hour has passed, quickly rinse each slice of eggplant under cold water and set out on a towel to dry.

To prepare your dredging station, set up a plate, followed by a bowl, followed by another plate. On the first plate, place your two cups of flour. In the bowl, crack four eggs and whip them to consistency. In a small mixing bowl, pour two cups of breadcrumbs, two tsp dried oregano, two tsp dried basil, one tsp garlic granules, a 1/2 tsp cracked pepper and a 1/2 tsp salt. Mix the contents of the bowl together and pour onto the last plate.

Preheat your oven to 325 F.

To dredge, set up a rack for the breaded eggplant to rest on before being fried. Begin the dredging process by lightly seasoning each piece of eggplant with salt and pepper. Then dip a piece of eggplant into the flour and coat completely. Shake off any loose flour and drop the eggplant slice into the eggs. Then, using a fork, lift the eggplant from the eggs and allow any excess egg to drip off. Now place into the breadcrumbs and coat completely. When coated, move the slice of eggplant to the rack. Do this for all slices of eggplant.

In a pan (I like to use a large cast-iron pan), pour enough light olive oil into the pan

to cover the entire bottom with about 1/8 inch of oil. Bring the flame up to medium-low and allow the olive oil to come up in temperature.

Near your frying oil, set up the following: a plate or sheet pan lined with paper towel; a glass Pyrex, CorningWare or chafing dish for the eggplant, the shredded mozzarella and the grated Parmigiano Reggiano, and the sauce in a pot over a low flame. Ladle a small amount of sauce into the bottom of the dish and spread it out across the entire bottom to create a light layer of sauce.

Begin to fry the eggplant by adding it to the fry oil (do not overcrowd the pan), allow the first side to brown lightly and then flip the eggplant. (Like my grandmother said, the eggplant cooks in the oven.) Once the second side is lightly browned, move the eggplant to a towel to drain. Add more eggplant to the fry oil to continue the process. Once the pieces on the towel are drained of any excess oil, move them to the Pyrex or chafing dish, cover with a large pinch of grated Parmigiano Reggiano, then a large pinch of mozzarella and a small ladle of sauce. Continue this process until all the eggplant has been fried, but remember that you will likely need to change out the oil in your pan at least once during this process.

The end result should be neatly stacked pieces of eggplant, three to four pieces high, with both cheeses and a small ladle of sauce between each stack. Once you have assembled all stacks, add a generous sprinkle of mozzarella across the top and place in the oven for 45 minutes.

Remove from the oven when done, let cool for 10-15 minutes and then serve family-style.