

FLAVOR of the WEEK

~ Shannon Waters ~

Eggplant

I freakin' love eggplant. It has such a unique flavor but can still be paired with almost anything. I LOVE IT! The farm has these really beautiful white and purple ones that I plucked right from the plants today and marveled at their beauty. I was going to use them as an ingredient in a pasta filling, but instead, I'd rather have them be the main show of the dish. The inspiration for this pasta sauce comes from caponata- a delicious Sicilian condiment made with eggplant and the season's surplus- so it shares a lot of the wonderful acidic properties that make caponata so addictive.

SPAGHETTI WITH ROASTED EGGPLANT, TOMATOES, AND PINE NUTS

Preheat your oven to 425

3 Eggplant

4 Cloves of garlic (2 slices, 2 chopped)

Salt and Pepper

½ Yellow Onion

½ bulb of Fennel

½ c of Pine Nuts

Olive Oil

8 oz of Spaghetti (bags usually come in 16 oz, so half a bag)

1 can of peeled, crushed San Marzano tomatoes

3 T Butter (at room temp)

2 T of Basil (chopped)

2 T of Parsley (chopped)

¼ c Golden Raisins

Nutmeg

1 Block of Parmigiano-Reggiano

EGGPLANT AND TOMATO SAUCE

First, trim off the stems. Since the eggplant you are getting are pretty squat in shape, cut them across at their midsection. Score the insides in a crosshatch pattern. Slice two garlic cloves thinly and slide them into the cuts of the flesh. Rub with olive oil and salt and lay inside flesh facing up and put in

the oven. Allow them to bake for 1 hour.

Meanwhile, you can prep the rest of your sauce. Dice both the fennel and onion and set aside. Toast your pine nuts.

After an hour, take the eggplant out of the oven and scoop out the insides straight into a colander and strain of their excess liquid.

Next, heat up a sauté pan and add the fennel and onion. Sweat over medium to low heat. While your vegetables sweat, get your pasta water heating up and season heavily- your pasta water should taste like the ocean. Carry on with making your sauce, but once your pasta water is boiling, add your pasta. If you want- you can make the sauce a day in advance and store it for dinner another night.

After 5 minutes of cooking the veggies over low heat, add the chopped garlic. Sweat for another five minutes, try not to achieve any color. Season with salt. Turn the heat up to high and add the eggplant and tomatoes. If the eggplant hasn't been drained long enough, there will be a lot of liquid- just cook it out over medium heat until some of the liquid has evaporated. Continue to cook the sauce until your pasta is cooked, then add it to the sauce. Add the room temp butter and toss a bunch of times to make sure it is incorporated evenly. Grate a little nutmeg into the mix, and sprinkle in the basil, parsley, raisins and a handful of pine nuts. Give it a final toss or two. Once in the bowl, you can garnish with a healthy amount of grated parmesan.

There aren't a lot of ingredients in this recipe, so the quality of them is important- as always. Seek out San Marzano tomatoes and Parmigiano-Reggiano, too!

Shannon is a line cook at Marea in NYC. She can be reached at her website or swatersdepaul@aol.com.