

## **Veggie Moussaka**

I found some end of season eggplant at the Farmer's Market and thought, what better way to use it, than to make this for Veggie Monday...not saying you can't make it on other days! This makes a really, really tasty vegetarian main course. A nice addition might be a salad and bread. What I like to do is broil the eggplant & make the sauce the day before, then throw them in the fridge until an hour before assembling the moussaka. Sometimes I make the moussaka in an 8" square pan and sometimes in 4 individual casseroles.

Makes 4 Servings

2 eggplants, 1 3/4 lbs., cut into 1/2" thick slices  
1 1/2 tsp. salt  
2 Tbsp EVO + more if needed  
1 cup crumbled feta cheese (my preference is Dodonis)

### **For The Tomato Sauce:**

2 Tbsp. EVOO  
1 1/2 onions, chopped into 1/4" dice  
1 medium-sized zucchini, cut into 1/4" dice  
1/2 red bell pepper, cut into 1/4" dice  
1/2 cup dry red wine  
2 cloves, garlic, minced  
2 tsp. dried oregano  
1/4 tsp. chili flakes, or to taste  
1/4 rounded tsp. cinnamon  
1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper  
10 oz. tinned Italian plum tomatoes, drained & chopped, reserve juice  
1/2 small tin tomato paste  
Salt to taste

### **For the Custard:**

2 Tbsp. each butter & unbleached flour  
3/4 cup homogenized or 2% milk  
1/4 tsp. salt  
1/8 tsp. each nutmeg & freshly ground black pepper  
2 eggs, lightly beaten  
1 cup ricotta or drained cottage cheese (**see below**)

### **Prepare The Eggplant:**

Layer the slices of eggplant in a large colander, sprinkling between each layer with salt. Let stand over a bowl to drain for approximately 30 – 45 minutes. Rinse the eggplant under cold water; place on lint-free towels & dry the slices well. Brush 2 rimmed baking pans with EVOO; brush one side of the eggplant slices with more oil; place on the baking pans, oil side down & brush the tops with more oil.

Meanwhile, place the oven rack at the highest level; turn the broiler on. When the oven is heated, place one baking pan at a time in the oven & broil the eggplant for 5 – 7 minutes, or until golden, turn the slices over & broil the other side until golden. Broil the remaining pan of eggplant in the same manner. Set aside until ready to assemble the moussaka.

### **Make The Tomato Sauce:**

Heat a large skillet over medium heat; add the EVOO, when hot but not smoking, add the onion, zucchini, red pepper & sauté until softened but not browned, approximately 5 minutes; add the garlic & sauté 1 minute longer. Stir in the oregano, cinnamon & pepper; cook, stirring for another minute; add the red wine & reduce until almost evaporated; add the chopped tomatoes & tomato paste to the pan to make a very thick sauce, you may need to add a few tablespoons of the reserved juice at this point if the sauce appears to be too thick at the beginning, otherwise keep the juice for another use. Bring the sauce to the boil; reduce the heat & simmer for 10 minutes or until zucchini is tender; season to taste with salt & pepper; set aside until ready to assemble the moussaka.

### **Make The Custard Sauce:**

The instructions below are for making the sauce in the microwave, however you can do the sauce on top of the stove in a pot if you must!

In a large, glass microwavable bowl, melt the butter, covered with a piece of wax paper or a glass lid or plate; whisk in the flour, return to the microwave & cook on level 5 for 1 – 2 minutes, or until the mixture is a bit bubbly. Gradually whisk in the milk until combined, return to the microwave & cook, uncovered, in 1 minute intervals, whisking between each interval, on level 10 or high, until the mixture comes to a boil & thickens. Remove from the microwave, whisk in the salt, nutmeg & pepper. Let cool for 10 minutes & then whisk in the ricotta or cottage cheese & eggs; set aside while you assemble the moussaka.

**\*\*To drain cottage cheese, place a sieve over a bowl & line with 2 layers of rinsed cheesecloth; place 2 cups of cottage cheese into the sieve, fold the cheesecloth over the cottage cheese, place a plate on top & a heavy weight on top of that, place in the fridge for 24 hours.**

### **Assemble The Moussaka:**

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

Oil an 8" baking dish or 4 individual baking dishes, place approximately 1/2 of the tomato sauce in the bottom of the pan; top with half the eggplant; sprinkle with 1/2 cup of the feta cheese. Top with the remaining tomato sauce & remaining eggplant; spread the custard sauce over the top, covering

completely; top with the remaining feta cheese. Place the moussaka in the oven & bake for 1 hour or until the top is browned & set. Let stand for 15 minutes; cut into squares to serve.

\*\*If making in 4 individual dishes, simply divide the ingredients amongst the casseroles. I think it's a good idea to place individual dishes on a baking sheet to make it easier to both put into & remove from the oven. The baking time may be a bit shorter than 1 hour.