

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Inside this issue:

Traditional Pesto	1
Roasted Eggplant	2
Baba Ghanoush	2
Save the World— One Dinner at a Time	3
Barbecued Eggplant and Lentils	3
Brown Rice	3
Roasted Plums with Grand Marnier	3
Southern Style Scalloped Eggplant	4

Saturdays with Pesto and Julia Child

It's Saturday morning and I have a plastic bag full of basil—about 8 quarts—sitting on my kitchen counter, with 1 1/2 pounds of nuts and the same of cheese, plus a whole head of garlic! Why so much bounty? For the past fifteen to twenty years, I have spent several summer Saturday afternoons making and freezing pesto. Just last Saturday, I made 4 batches—I froze nine bags and we had some for dinner too.

Now maybe I'm slow, but it takes me at least an hour to "de-stem" the basil, plus more time for peeling the garlic—so I go into the living room and watch PBS—Julia Child, *Everyday Food*—while I do those tedious tasks. Talk about inspiration!

Some weeks it's Traditional Pesto, but last week I was inspired to try pecans, cashews and almonds with aged provolone and parmesan. Invariably, Saturday dinner is a taste test of all the pesto varieties. I get a good crunchy baguette and a softer French bread, fresh mozzarella and ripe tomatoes. Everyone can make the ultimate sandwich—sometimes we grill them and the mozzarella melts into the pesto—you've gotta' try it!

Why so much pesto? So I can just reach into the freezer and pull out a frozen flat Ziploc to give someone a little bit of summer. I'll admit, it's something I love being able to share with people—it's definitely worth all the time I spend with Julia on Saturdays.

Traditional Pesto

INGREDIENTS

4 cups basil leaves, washed and dried
1 cup pine nuts
4 cloves garlic
1 cup Parmesan, shredded
1/2 cup olive oil

DIRECTIONS

Place basil, pine nuts and garlic in food processor. Pulse until large chunks are gone. Add cheese and process while adding olive oil. Remove from processor and either use immediately or freeze.

Makes 2 1/2 cups

Serving as a spread? Keep pesto fresh by covering the surface with drizzled olive oil to keep air from oxidizing the color.

Serving hot on pasta? Remember to save 2 cups of hot pasta water to thin the pesto and mix with the pasta. In a large bowl, toss one cup of pesto with one cup of pasta water, stir in one pound of cooked pasta and add extra water if needed to make a creamy sauce that coats the pasta. Add black pepper to taste. Serve with extra cheese, nuts and shredded basil leaves for added flavor.

Freezing? Place in quart size freezer Ziplocs, press flat to remove all the air, seal and place all bags together in another bag. Freeze flat. Can be frozen up to one year if sealed well. Does not need to be thawed before using on hot pasta.

Eggplant Parmesan

I absolutely love Eggplant Parmesan, but you will never get a recipe from me—it is the one dish I cannot make! I've tried and some versions were so bad—well, let's just say I'm surprised he married me after tasting that recipe! I rely on the kindness of my eggplant savvy friends or I order an Eggplant Parmesan sub from Napolitano's.

It's Local, It's Fresh, It's Eggplant

What's plump and purple? Italian eggplant! What's long, thin and purple? Oriental eggplant! What's small, round and green? Thai eggplant!

No matter the color or shape, there's an eggplant for every recipe. The larger purple varieties originated in China, made their way to Italy by the 16th century and now there are many paler, milder varieties of eggplant, such as white or lavender-striped. Other types of eggplants, originally grown in Southeast Asia as early as the 5th century, are either the long, thin varieties or the small globe shapes.

I have used the Italian eggplant for everything, but have recently begun roasting the Oriental types, skin on, because they have a creamy texture and mild flavor that you can enjoy by itself. Here's a non-recipe recipe for **Roasted Eggplant**: Chop the eggplant into bite-sized pieces, toss in a little olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast in a 350-400 degree oven until fork-tender. The small Thai eggplants can be roasted whole, but poke them with a knife or fork to prevent the steam from building up inside and exploding all over your oven.

Locally grown muscadine grapes are in their peak season right now. You might also know them by the name scuppernong, which was the earliest named variety of the muscadine. Check your Farmers Market or look in the classified ad section of the newspaper for u-pick grape farms. There are a number of farms around this area. The grapes are ready to pick, bursting with sweet flavorful juice, perfect for jams and jellies.

What's Fresh Right Now?

Basil
Cucumbers—hydroponic
Eggplant—Nadia, Ichiban, Machiaw, Thai, Lavender Touch
Grapes—Muscadines
Honey—Tupelo, Gallberry, Orange Blossom
Kale
Melons—watermelon, cantaloupe
Okra
Pears—Florida Sand
Peppers—jalapeno, banana, poblanos, sweet Bell, pasilla
Squash—acorn, butternut, yellow summer, Pink Banana, calabaza, pumpkin
Tomatoes—beefsteak

Plants—bedding flowers, native trees, bushes and flowering plants

Baba Ghanoush

INGREDIENTS

1 large eggplant
1/3 cup tahini
1 clove garlic, smashed and chopped
salt, black pepper and cayenne pepper to taste
1/2 cup parsley, chopped
1 tablespoon olive oil

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Use a fork to prick eggplant in several places. Place eggplant on foil-covered cookie sheet and bake until soft. Let cool, then scrape pulp into a bowl.

Mix eggplant pulp with tahini and garlic. Beat until creamy and season to taste.

Parsley mixed in or scattered on top? Your choice! (I prefer lots of parsley mixed in)
Drizzle with olive oil and serve at room temperature or refrigerate covered. Great with pita bread or crunchy breadsticks.

Barbecued Eggplant and Lentils

adapted from Nikki and David Goldbeck's American Wholefoods Cuisine

INGREDIENTS

1 cup dry lentils, cooked in 2 cups water
1 medium eggplant, cut into 1 inch cubes
1/2 cup whole wheat flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup olive oil
2 onions, sliced thinly
2 cups tomato puree and pulp
2 Tablespoons each cider vinegar and tamari
1 1/2 Tablespoons honey
2 teaspoons chile powder
1/4 - 1/2 teaspoon hot pepper sauce

DIRECTIONS

Combine flour and salt in a paper bag and shake cubed eggplant to coat. Heat oil and fry eggplant about 10 minutes, turning to brown all sides. Add all other ingredients, except lentils, bring to gentle boil, cover, lower heat and simmer for 15-20 minutes. Taste sauce for seasoning and adjust to taste. Stir in lentils, replace cover and simmer over low heat for 30 minutes. Add more tomato products if sauce becomes too thick or dry. Keeps well in refrigerator. As with other tomato-based dishes, leftovers actually taste better a day or two later.

Brown Rice

INGREDIENTS

1 Tablespoon olive oil
2 cups organic long grain brown rice
4 cups hot water
1/2 teaspoon salt

DIRECTIONS

Heat pan, add oil and rice. Stir rice over medium heat for 1-2 minutes to coat with oil and heat rice. Add hot water, stir to mix, raise heat to high and let rice come to a boil. Add salt, stir, cover pan with a tight fitting lid, turn heat to low and simmer for 45 minutes without opening lid. After 45 minutes, open lid and tilt pot. If there is any unabsorbed water, cover pot and continue cooking for 10-15 minutes. Turn heat off, place clean dishtowel or doubled paper towels over open pot, cover with lid and allow to rest for 15 minutes. Fluff with a fork and serve.

Tricks and Tips

Leftover rice has many yummy uses—rice pudding, fried rice with veggies, and curried rice with frozen sweet green peas. Make extra rice every time and you will have a fast meal just waiting in your refrigerator.

Roasted Plums with Grand Marnier

INGREDIENTS

8 plums
1 Tablespoon brown sugar
1/4 cup juice (try apple or cranberry)
2 Tablespoons Grand Marnier

DIRECTIONS

Cut washed plums in half, remove pit and place plum cut side up in a baking dish. Sprinkle with brown sugar, juice, and Grand Marnier. Cover and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Let cool for at least 30 minutes. Serve with ice cream or gelato.

Hogtown HomeGrown

Local and Seasonal Recipes, Menus and More

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Tricks and Tips

Remember all the eggplant recipes that began—
”Salt eggplant, let sit for 30 minutes, rinse and drain”?
I never do that any-
more since so many
mild varieties are
available. Why
spend time in the
kitchen when you
don't have to?

Southern Style Scalloped Eggplant

INGREDIENTS

- 1 large eggplant, peeled and chopped into 1 inch pieces
- 1 large Vidalia onion, chopped
- 2 cups whole wheat crackers, crushed with a few chunks
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 Tablespoon unsalted butter, melted
- 1 cup milk (you may need more depending on your casserole)

DIRECTIONS

Boil eggplant and onion in just enough water to cover. Cook until eggplant is fork-tender. Drain eggplant-onion mixture. Layer mixture in buttered casserole with crushed crackers, sprinkling each layer with cracked black pepper, finishing the top layer with crackers. Drizzle with melted butter. Pour milk into the corners of the casserole until you can just see it below the top layer. Bake 30 minutes at 350 degrees. Serve hot.