

# Eggplant Caponata

serves 6-8

This is a traditional Sicilian side dish, often used as a dip for crusty bread or crackers. It is rich, pungent, and bold in flavor. Some recipes have only 4-5 ingredients and others have 15-20. Every Sicilian family has their own rendition of this classic dish.

**1 medium, firm eggplant**

**2 T. olive oil**

**3/4 c. diced onion, 1/4"**

**1 clove garlic**

**1/2 c. diced celery, 1/4"**

**2 perfectly ripe summer tomatoes  
or 1 1/2 c. good quality canned**

**Italian tomatoes, 1/2" dice**

**2 T. capers**

**2 T. Italian black olives, such as  
saracena, roughly chopped**

**2 T. fresh basil leaves, chopped**

**2 T. fresh Italian parsley, chopped**

**1 tsp. salt**

**1/2 tsp. fresh ground black pepper**

**2 T. red wine vinegar**

**2 tsp. sugar**

**1 tsp. olive oil additional**

Traditionally, caponata is prepared by peeling and cubing the eggplant, layering in a colander with salt, weighing down the cubes with a plate, draining the bitter juices off, rinsing, squeezing dry, then frying the cubes in oil until soft. Roasting is a simpler, though not traditional, method of handling the eggplant, first taught to me by fellow chef and dear friend Margaret Woodside.

Pierce the eggplant skin in 3-4 places with a knife and rub with a couple drops of olive oil. Place in a 425° oven on a baking sheet until completely soft and shriveled; the skin will begin to char. Depending on the size and variety of eggplant this will take 10-25 minutes. When done, slit open the eggplant to allow the heat to escape. When cool enough to handle, scoop out the flesh and chop coarsely into 1/2—1" chunks. Alternately, you can peel the eggplant and cut into 1/2" cubes, toss the cubes with a tablespoon of olive oil and a sprinkling of salt, and roast the cubes until soft, 8-12 minutes. Place the eggplant in a bowl.

Heat the olive oil in a medium-large frying pan on medium high heat. Add the onion and saute' for 5 minutes. Add the garlic and saute' for another 5 minutes. Meanwhile, boil a cup or two of water, add the celery, and blanch for 3 minutes. Drain well and set aside. When the onions are translucent and beginning to brown, add the tomatoes, capers, and olives. Saute' for 5 minutes. Then add the celery, basil, parsley, salt, pepper, vinegar, and sugar and stir well. Lower the heat to medium low and cook for 5 minutes, allowing all the flavors and textures to marry and mingle. Taste and adjust the seasoning to suit your palate.

Serve at room temperature with crusty bread as a side dish or appetizer. This is a festive dish, usually served as one of many little enticing treats.