



Comfort Food: Eggplant Parmesan

2009 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard Cabernet Franc

Serves 8

Cabernet Franc is a wonderful red varietal for pairing with foods. Strong herbal tones, bright red fruit and subtle, yet present, tannins allow it to pair with meat dishes as well as several vegetarian entrees. Eggplant tends to be a natural pairing, due to its own unique, earthy qualities. Here, we elevate the eggplant to make it an even better companion for the 2009 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard Cabernet Franc by layering it with a flavorful tomato sauce, pungent parmesan cheese and an herb flecked breadcrumb crust.

Ingredients

Plenty of extra virgin olive oil	½ cup fresh basil leaves
1 yellow onion, chopped	¾ lb fresh mozzarella, torn into small pieces
4 garlic cloves, minced	1 cup shredded Parmesan cheese
2 28-oz cans crushed tomatoes	2 tbs butter
Salt and pepper to taste	¼ cup Panko style bread crumbs
3 large eggplants, sliced into ¼" thick rounds	½ tsp dried basil

Directions

Lay out all slices on eggplant and sprinkle with table salt. Allow to stand for 20-25 minutes, then blot excess moisture with a paper towel.

Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet. Add the onion and sauté until tender, about 3 minutes, then add three of the garlic cloves. Cook for another 2 minutes and then add the crushed tomatoes. Bring the mixture to a simmer and allow to cook for about 30 minutes until the sauce has thickened. Season to taste with salt and pepper and set aside.

In a very large skillet, heat another 2-3 tablespoons of olive oil (enough to fully coat the bottom of the pan). Working in batches, cook the eggplant over moderately high heat until golden on each side (about 5-6 minutes). As the eggplant comes out of the pan, drain on paper towels. Add more olive oil as needed between each batch and periodically wipe out the pan to avoid burning oil.

Meanwhile, melt the butter over medium heat in a small skillet. Add the remaining garlic clove, bread crumbs and dried basil. Cook until the bread crumbs are golden and set aside.

Preheat the oven to 400°.

Coat the bottom of a large baking dish with tomato sauce, about 1 cup. Fit 1/3 of the eggplant slices into the bottom of the dish. Scatter with ½ of the basil leaves, ½ of the mozzarella and 1/3 of the parmesan. Create an identical layer with tomato sauce, eggplant, basil, mozzarella and parmesan. Add one more layer with a generous amount of tomato sauce, the remaining eggplant and parmesan. Add the breadcrumb mixture over the top to create a thin crust.

Bake for 45 minutes until the top is golden and the sauce is bubbling. Let stand for 10-15 minutes before serving.