

سلطة باذنجان *Salatit Banjar*

SMOKY EGGPLANT SALAD WITH GARLIC AND PARSLEY

The eggplant has been known as a suspect vegetable in some cultures. According to the food scholar Charles Perry, the Greek *melitzana* and Italian *melanzana* come from the Latin *mala insana*, meaning “mad apple.” In the same vein, the Sanskrit name *vatingana*, means “belonging to the windy class,” a designation associated with madness. Egyptians have a saying when someone contradicts himself: *Adi zaman al-batinjan*, or “It’s eggplant time.” Arabs and Jews have always embraced this curious vegetable, despite the negative associations. As early as the seventh century, Arabs ate eggplant and called it *sayyid al-khudar*, “the lord of the vegetables.” The scorn historically lodged against eggplant may come from the difficulty of rendering it fit to consume; indeed, the foamlike pulp must be cooked well to be eaten.

Here, the eggplant is cooked directly over fire. The charred flavor that this method imparts is essential to this recipe. Oven roasting simply does not produce the distinctive smokiness that contrasts wonderfully with the earthy tomato and acidic lemon in this salad.

2 medium eggplants

1 medium tomato, chopped

1 green bell pepper,
seeded and chopped (optional)

½ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

½ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
(2 to 3 lemons)

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

3 garlic cloves, chopped
(about 1½ teaspoons)

1 teaspoon ground cumin

½ teaspoon Aleppo pepper,
or ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1. Pierce the skins of the eggplants in a few places with a fork. Place each eggplant directly into a medium-high flame and turn occasionally. The skins of the eggplants should eventually blister and shrivel. Remove the eggplants from the heat once they are thoroughly charred and you can sense that the flesh inside has become heavy with moisture. It may take about 30 minutes to arrive at this point. Let cool.

2. Cut the eggplants in half lengthwise, scoop out their flesh, and put in a colander. Discard the peels. Press the eggplant flesh firmly against the colander to remove excess liquid. Mash the eggplants with a fork in a large bowl.

3. Combine the mashed eggplant flesh with the tomato, bell pepper (if desired), parsley, lemon juice, olive oil, garlic, cumin, Aleppo pepper, and salt. Give it a good stir.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings