

imam bayaldi (stuffed eggplant)

The name of this famous Turkish dish implies it was so good that “the imam fainted.” I hope you won’t keel over, but you’re sure to delight in the contrast of colors, flavors, and textures in this hearty dish. Enjoy it as a main course with rice or as a side dish for grilled fare. Serves 8 as a side dish; 4 as a main course

- 4 small Italian eggplants (about 2 lb.)
- 10 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt
- 2½ lb. tomatoes, halved
- 1 large sweet onion, diced (about 2 cups)
- 1 medium green bell pepper, diced (about 1 cup)
- ½ cup finely chopped cauliflower
- 1 Tbs. finely chopped garlic
- ½ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley; more for garnish

- 1 tsp. finely chopped fresh oregano or ½ tsp. dried
- Aleppo pepper or crushed red pepper flakes
- 3 oz. (about ¾ cup) crumbled feta; more for garnish

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F.

Halve each eggplant lengthwise and place cut side up on a large rimmed baking sheet. Season the cut sides with salt and brush very generously with 4 Tbs. of the oil. Flip the eggplant over and roast, cut side down, until very soft, about 35 minutes. Set aside until cool enough to handle.

Meanwhile, grate the cut sides of the tomatoes on the large holes of a box grater. Discard the skins. Drain the pulp in a fine-mesh sieve, stirring occasionally, until most of their liquid has strained through, about 20 minutes.

Heat 3 Tbs. of the oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the pepper, cauliflower, and garlic; cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables have softened somewhat, another 5 minutes. Remove from the heat. Stir in the tomato pulp, parsley, and oregano, and season to taste with pepper and salt. Stir in the feta.

Using a spatula, flip the eggplant over. With a slotted spoon, divide the filling among the eggplant, using the spoon to gently push the filling into the flesh. Drizzle with the remaining 3 Tbs. oil and bake until hot, about 10 minutes. Sprinkle with more crumbled feta and parsley, and serve.

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Pair vegetables with more vegetables

Stuffing vegetables with more vegetables is common in the Mediterranean; think stuffed peppers. Here, a salsa-like mixture of tomato, onion, and cauliflower finds a home in tender roasted eggplant.

