

Ciambotta Italian Vegetable Stew

Pestata

1/3 cup chopped fresh basil
1/3 cup fresh oregano leaves
6 garlic cloves
2 Tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes

Vegetable Stew

1 small eggplant (about 12 ounces)
Table Salt
4 Tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 large onion
1 pound russet potatoes (about 2 potatoes)
2 Tablespoons tomato paste
2 ¼ cups water
28-ounce can whole peeled tomatoes

2 zucchini (8-oz each)
2 red or yellow bell peppers
1 cup shredded fresh basil



To prepare the pestata, roughly chop fresh basil and remove fresh oregano leaves from stems. Peel 6 garlic cloves and roughly chop. Add all ingredients into a food processor, process for 1 minute until everything is finely ground. It will be necessary to scrape down the sides of the processor bowl. Set aside.

Use a potato peeler to peel eggplant; cut into 1/2" dice. Put into bowl with 1 ½ teaspoons table salt; toss to combine. Line a large plate with two layers of coffee filters. Spray filters lightly with vegetable oil spray, and evenly spread eggplant over the filters. Microwave for about 10 minutes; mixing half way through cooking time so that it cooks evenly.

While eggplant is in microwave, peel potatoes and cut into ½ inch dice. Peel and chop a large onion. Drain tomatoes, reserving the juice, and coarsely chop. Seed and cut zucchini into 1/2" dice. Remove the seeds and ribs of bell pepper, and cut into 1/2" dice.

Set a Dutch oven over high burner. Add 2 tablespoons olive oil and preheat until it begins to shimmer. Saute eggplant, onion, and potatoes for 2 minutes. Move vegetables towards the sides, add another 1 tablespoon olive oil to the clearing. Cook tomatoes paste in oil for 2 minutes. Stir frequently until a brown fond develops. Deglaze the pan with 2 cups water. Add chopped tomatoes and their juices and bring up to boil. Turn down burner to medium, cover pot, and allow to simmer for 20 to 25 minutes.

Meanwhile in a separate 12" skillet set over high burner. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil and preheat until shimmering. Add zucchini and bell peppers, sprinkle with 1/2 teaspoon salt. Saute for 10 to 12 minutes until the vegetables become browned. Move vegetable towards sides on the skillet and cook pestata in the clearing for 1 minute. Mix everything together. Remove skillet from heat and add 1/4 cup of water, which you can use to deglaze the pan. After the vegetables in the Dutch oven are ready (the eggplant has completely broken down and potatoes are tender), remove from heat and add the vegetables from the skillet. Cover and allow the flavors to combine for 20 minutes before serving. Finally stir in shredded basil and adjust salt according to your taste.

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