

Sauteed Eggplant in Spicy Garlic Sauce

SERVES 4 to 6

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS

For an eggplant recipe with rich, meaty flavor, we turned to salting. We found that eggplant must macerate for at least 1 1/2 hours, preferably for two to three, to allow the salt to do its job. Salting alone, however, was not sufficient. The flesh of the eggplant also had to be firmly pressed between sheets of paper towels; pressing extruded the juice and compacted the flesh. Finally, no matter what the cooking method, we found eggplant always came out firmer, browner, and sweeter when cooked slowly rather than quickly.

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds eggplant (about 2 medium eggplants)

1 tablespoon table salt

2 tablespoons sesame oil (dark)

1 tablespoon peanut oil or vegetable oil

Ground black pepper

2 tablespoons minced garlic

¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes

2 tablespoons

dry sherry

2 tablespoons

dark soy sauce

2 tablespoons vinegar (any kind)

2 teaspoons minced fresh ginger

1 teaspoon granulated sugar

2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro leaves

2 tablespoons thin-sliced scallions

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut off and discard stem and bottom end of each eggplant. Cut eggplants crosswise into 3/4-inch slices, then cut slices into 3/4-inch strips. Place strips in a colander, sprinkle with salt, and toss. Set colander over a bowl or in the sink and let eggplant stand for at least 1 1/2 hours, preferably for 2 to 3, stirring it a couple of times.

2. Rinse eggplant under cold, running water, rubbing the strips lightly in your hands. Shake colander to drain. Lay strips about 1 inch apart on a triple thickness of paper towels; cover with another triple layer of towels. Using your palms, press each eggplant strip very firmly until it looks green and translucent and feels firm and leathery when pressed between fingertips. Repeat pressing process on fresh toweling if eggplant has not yet reached this stage. Repeat with remaining eggplant strips. (Can refrigerate up to 3 hours before cooking.)
3. In a heavy-bottomed 12-inch skillet, heat sesame oil and peanut oil until mixture shimmers. Add eggplant strips; saute until they begin to brown, about 3 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook, stirring occasionally, until eggplant is fully tender and lightly browned, 15 to 20 minutes.
4. While eggplant cooks, in a cup stir sherry, dark soy sauce, vinegar, and sugar together until sugar dissolves.
5. When eggplant is fully tender and lightly browned, stir in black pepper, garlic, ginger, and red pepper flakes; cook to blend flavors, 1 minute. Add sherry mixture and simmer until liquid is absorbed into eggplant, about 1 minute.
6. Remove pan from heat, stir in cilantro and scallions, and serve.