

Vegan Eggplant Fideuà

Intrigued recently by this Ottolenghi Guardian Catalan recipe this fideuà is a remarkable blend of flavors and textures. Not familiar with the term, I learned that it was a bit of a cross between a risotto and paella and often features shrimp and fish. Admittedly the many steps involved are not for the impatient, but trust me, every moment you dedicate to bringing this to table will be richly rewarded.

Ingredients: The vegetables

- Olive oil
- 3 large red peppers (350g)
- 2 firm eggplants (600g)
- Fine sea salt and black pepper

Directions

1. Set a griddle pan on a high heat and ventilate your kitchen. As the pan heats, prepare the peppers and eggplants by rubbing a bit oil all over the skins. When the grill pan is hot, lay out as many the vegetables.
2. Keep a close watch and rotate as the skin blackens. This process takes up to 30 minutes and is complete when the vegetable is charred on all sides. Set them aside to cool completely.
3. Once the peppers and eggplant are cool enough to handle, peel off and discard the skins. Remove stems and seeds from the peppers. Tear the peppers and eggplant into strands. Lay out on a large plate, sprinkling with salt and set aside.

Ingredients: The pasta base

- 250g GF vermicelli or capellini pasta broken into roughly 3cm lengths

- Olive oil
 - 2 onions, peeled and thinly sliced
 - 3 garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced or 2 shallots peeled and sliced thin
 - 1 tbsp tomato paste
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp smoked paprika
 - 1 large plum tomato chopped fine
 - 500ml prepared vegetable broth
1. Place a heavy, 11-12 inch (28cm,) nonstick lided frying pan over medium-high heat. Add the vermicelli to toast. Keep a very close watch and stir frequently until most pieces are a deep golden shade. Tip pasta into a bowl and set aside.
 2. Return pan to the heat, add a splash of olive oil and saute the onions, stirring, until soft and lightly brown. Stir in the garlic or shallots, tomato paste and paprika, cook for another three minutes, until fragrant.

Combining

1. Add the pasta pieces, tomato pieces, broth, a teaspoon of salt and a good grind of pepper and combine well. Lay eggplant and pepper strands on top in small piles, leaving spaces to see the pasta below. Cover the pan, turn down the heat to medium, and leave to simmer for 10-12 minutes, until all the liquid has been absorbed.
2. To create a crisp base, remove the lid, turn down the heat to low and allow to cook undisturbed, for approximately 10-12 minutes. When done the pasta at the edge of the pan starts to curl inwards. It's a bit tricky to create a crisp crust and not burn, patience and low heat is the key.
3. Remove from heat and allow to sit and rest for 10 minutes before serving.

Ingredients: The Picada

Traditionally added during the last stage of cooking, here the picada is more of a topping.

- 1 slice stale GF bread
- 60ml olive oil
- 35g whole almonds
- 1 cascabel chili, stem and seeds removed, flesh roughly crushed
- 1 minced garlic clove or small shallot
- 15g (4 T) flat-leaf parsley leaves, finely chopped
- 5g dill leaves, finely chopped

1. While the Fideuà cooks or during the rest period, prepare the picada topping.
2. Use as small frying pan on medium heat or a toaster to toast the bread until lightly colored.
3. Add the oil to the fry pan and when heated add almonds and fry for three to four minutes, until lightly golden. Stir in crushed cascabel chili and garlic set aside to cool.
4. When bread and almonds have cooled, place in a small processor and blitz until the consistency of bread crumbs, add herbs, blitz again. Add to a small bowl and stir a pinch or two of salt.

Serving

1 lemon, cut into 6 wedges

Spoon half the picada over the fideuà and serve straight from the pan with the lemon wedges with remaining picada alongside.