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*A Worldwide Vegetarian Journey to Discover the Foods That Nourish America's Immigrant Soul.*

April 2017

**PERISHABLE VEGETABLE PLANNING**

*Lasagne with Eggplant and Two Sauces*

*Celeriac Rémoulade Salad with Shallot*

*Italian Braised Fennel au gratin*

*Mexican Watermelon and Jicama Salad*

*Mexican Prickly Pear Cactus and Jicama Salsa*

Once you face the need to downsize your menus and you train yourself to halve those big family recipes, you will find that certain vegetables tend to be passed over because they just do not keep well. Although my husband would love to see eggplant on the menu day after day, I crave variety. As a consequence, I started thinking of ways to use vegetables that must not be left to die in the crisper drawer. Ideas for four such vegetables follow—eggplant, celeriac, fennel, and *jicama*.

If you can find tiny Indian **eggplants**, a slender, lavender Japanese eggplant, or a small graffiti eggplant, these mini eggplants can solve the problem of leftovers. However, to the downsized family those mini treasures are often unavailable and you have to settle for a large, dark purple eggplant. Remember to choose a firm, unblemished male eggplant; it will have less seeds. The female fruit has a depression in the base, i. e., at



the point of flower attachment, while the male fruit routinely has a rounded bottom. Often, faced with a large eggplant, I make several small casseroles of eggplant *parmigiana* as I discussed last month or a batch of *ratatouille*, the recipe for which can be found in volume I of *A Worldwide Journey to Discover the Foods That Nourish America's Immigrant Soul*. Both can be frozen. More often than not we bread and bake a few eggplant slices as a vegetable side and prepare an Asian eggplant salad, several good recipes for which can be found in volume II of my cookbook. The third dish can be any of the many casseroles and skillet dishes you will find in those volumes but you might like to consider the following recipe for eggplant lasagna with two sauces. It is a superb, albeit out-of-the-ordinary, *lasagne*.



## LASAGNE WITH EGGPLANT AND TWO SAUCES

# *Lasagne al Forno di Melenzana*

TPT - 2 hours and 20 minutes;  
30 minutes = breaded eggplant setting period

*Years ago my dearest friend Myrna served a lasagna made with a white sauce. It fascinated me and although I requested the recipe, she could never find it. The idea of creating a lasagna with a white sauce was never forgotten but a lasagna for two . . . ?*

*While in Italy, we experienced eggplant parmigiana and lasagna very unlike that we were used to in the New York metropolitan area of the United States. The Sicilian and Neapolitan immigrants who settled near New York had introduced multi-layered casseroles that were "the way it should be." The flavors in Italy were right but the folded-over pasta technique was "not the way it should be."*

*Many years later I created, for Ray and Myrna, a lasagna with eggplant using the fold-over technique, such as we ate at Umberto's in Rome, and I added two sauces, a marinara sauce and the béchamel sauce I remember so well from that dinner with Myrna and her mother. It is not as complicated as it looks and once you have made it a time or two, it will be a favorite, we are sure. These individual lasagna servings make elegant, intimate centerpieces for a holiday dinner which can be made early in the day or the day before and baked just before serving. We accompany this with a green vegetable such as whole green beans and a complex tossed salad.*

**1/2 small eggplant—sliced into 1/4-inch crosswise  
slices to yield 4 slices\***

**Coarse or kosher salt**

**6 tablespoons fine, dry, whole wheat breadcrumbs  
Pinch freshly ground black pepper**

**2 tablespoons fat-free pasteurized eggs**

**1 tablespoon safflower or sunflower oil**

**4 quarts boiling water**  
**High protein lasagne noodles—2 long pieces**  
**1 teaspoon safflower or sunflower oil**

**4 ounces part-skimmed milk ricotta cheese—brought to room temperature**

**3/4 tablespoon fat-free pasteurized eggs**  
**1 tablespoon grated Parmesan or pecorino Romano cheese, as preferred**  
**1 tablespoon finely chopped, fresh flat-leaved Italian parsley**  
**Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

**2 ounces part-skimmed milk, low-moisture mozzarella cheese—thinly sliced into 4 slices and brought to room temperature**

**1/4 cup FRESH MARINARA SAUCE (*Salsa Marinara*)\*\*  
or other tomato sauce of choice**

**BÉCHAMEL SAUCE:**

**3/4 teaspoon butter**  
**1 1/2 teaspoons unbleached white flour**  
**6 tablespoons two-percent milk**

**1 tablespoon grated Parmesan or pecorino Romano cheese, as preferred**

**Grated Parmesan or pecorino Romano cheese**

Rinse eggplant slices well in cold water and pat dry. Dip each slice in breadcrumbs seasoned with black pepper; then dip each in the 2 tablespoonfuls beaten egg; and then again in breadcrumbs. Arrange breaded eggplant slices on a plate and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to allow breading to set.

Place a rimmed cookie sheet in the oven to heat. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

Remove preheated baking sheet from the oven. Pour 1 tablespoonful of oil on the pan; brush to edges. Arrange eggplant slices on prepared baking sheet. Bake in preheated 350 degree F. oven for 20 minutes. Remove baking sheet from oven. Turn each eggplant slice. Return to oven for about 10 minutes more, or until each slice is crisp and well-browned. Drain eggplant slices *thoroughly* on several thicknesses of paper toweling. Place platter with cooked eggplant on a warming tray to keep warm.

Prepare *lasagne* noodles according to package directions. Add oil to cooking water just before the *al dente* state is reached. When *al dente*, drain and rinse with *cold* water. Allow to drain thoroughly. Cut *one-third* of the length from each *lasagna* strip. Separate the *pasta* strips and set aside until required.

In a mixing bowl, combine *ricotta* cheese, 3/4 tablespoonful pasteurized eggs, 1 tablespoonful grated cheese, *finely* chopped fresh parsley, and black pepper. Mix well.

In a small saucepan set over *LOW* heat, heat *marinara* sauce. Remove from heat to a warming tray to keep warm.

Meanwhile, prepare *béchamel* sauce. In a saucepan set over *LOW* heat, melt butter. Remove from heat and, using a wire whisk, make a *roux* by beating in flour. Return to heat and, stirring constantly, cook for 2 minutes, *being careful not to burn or overbrown the roux*. Remove from heat and gradually beat in milk. Return saucepan to heat and cook, stirring constantly, until thickened. Remove from heat to a warming tray to keep warm. Stir the remaining 1 tablespoonful grated cheese into the *béchamel* sauce.

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F.

Prepare 2 individual *au gratin* dishes or 2 dinner plates, that can go from oven to table, by coating with non-stick lecithin spray coating.

**FINAL ASSEMBLY:**

Arrange two long, cooked *lasagna* noodles on each dish or plate, draping it off one side of plate.

Spread a little warm *marinara* sauce on the half of each noodle that is in the center of plate.

Place a cooked, breaded eggplant slice on top of the red sauce.

Spoon a little warm *béchamel* sauce on top of the eggplant.

Place a slice of *mozzarella* cheese on top of the white sauce.

Place the small pieces of the cooked *pasta* on top of each *mozzarella* slice.

Divide the remaining *béchamel* sauce between the servings, spooning it on top of the small piece of *pasta*.

Divide the *ricotta* mixture between the servings, spreading it evenly over the white sauce.

Divide the remaining *marinara* sauce between the servings, spooning it on top of the *ricotta* mixture.

Top each serving with a generous slice of *mozzarella*.

Fold the rest of the large *pasta* slices up and over the layers.

Sprinkle each serving with grated cheese.

Bake in preheated 325 degree F. oven for 25 minutes, or until *mozzarella* has melted and *lasagne* is heated through. Remove from the oven.

*Serve at once*, directly from the *au gratin* dish in which they were baked or transfer each to a dinner plate. Serve with grated cheese for those who may want a bit more.

Yields 2 servings  
adequate for 2 people

Notes: \*The eggplant can easily be prepared the day before. Instead of just preparing four slices of eggplant, I buy a small eggplant which I slice and prepare as above. Only four of the slices are used for this *lasagne*. The rest of the breaded and baked eggplant slices go into the refrigerator to provide a snack or sandwich. These little eggplant rounds are a favorite tea item for us!

\*\*This recipe can be found on p. 682 of volume II of *A Worldwide Vegetarian Journey to Discover the Foods That Nourish America's Immigrant Soul*.

This recipe can be doubled or tripled easily.

1/2 SERVING – PROTEIN = 27.1 g.; FAT = 23.1 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 56.3 g.;  
CALORIES = 512; CALORIES FROM FAT = 41%



**Celeriac**, or knob celery, is another root that does not keep well in the vegetable drawer of the refrigerator after it is sliced. Consequently, it is a vegetable that requires some planning once you purchase it. A salad of root vegetable matchsticks with a honey-mustard dressing is usually our first menu maker. Then, this Celeriac *Rémoulade* Salad with Shallot goes on the

menu. If there is any leftover, I either make a soup, braise slices, or purée the celeriac with potato, and a bit of both apple and carrot for a vegetable side dish that makes a bowl of mashed potatoes seem rather mundane. Celeriac's bright celery taste can really add sparkle to a salad or to the dinner plate.

## CELERIAC *RÉMOULADE* SALAD WITH SHALLOT

TPT - 9 minutes

*Actually I do not remember my mother ever using celery root although she did love celery and there were always a couple of celery roots in my grandparents' root cellar. There is, I fear, an image problem that this ugly root must overcome, a problem that results in people just bypassing it in the market. Since it browns quickly when cut, you never see the farmers at market slicing this one to offer a taste. When the leaves are cut off and the brown covering is peeled away, a crisp, white vegetable is revealed.*

**1 cup shredded celeriac (celery root or knob celery)**  
**1 large shallot—peeled, trimmed, and shredded**

### ***RÉMOULADE* DRESSING:**

**2 tablespoons *calorie-reduced or light* mayonnaise**  
**1 teaspoon freshly squeezed lemon juice**  
**1 teaspoon *Dijon* mustard with wine**  
**Freshly ground black pepper**

**2 large red lettuce leaves**  
**1 hard-cooked egg—peeled and cut into wedges**



In a mixing bowl, combine shredded celeriac and shallot. Toss.

In a small dish, combine mayonnaise, lemon juice, mustard, and pepper. Stir to combine well. Add to vegetable mixture and stir to coat vegetables well with dressing. Chill in refrigerator until ready to serve.

Place a lettuce leaf on each of two salad plates. Divide celeriac mixture between the two lettuce leaves, heaping it attractively in the middle of the plates.

Garnish each serving with two egg wedges.

Yields 2 individual servings

Note: This recipe can be doubled or tripled, when required.

1/2 SERVING – PROTEIN = 4.1 g.; FAT = 8.0 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 6.1 g.;  
CALORIES = 112; CALORIES FROM FAT = 64%

When you bring home a beautiful bulb of Florence **FENNEL** and slice it to include in the evening's salad or for a snack, you have a cut surface that can oxidize very quickly. The next time it is taken from the crisper drawer, despite a tight plastic seal, a generous portion of the surface has to be sliced off and resigned to the compost pile. In the winter, when I have a good chance of finding blood oranges and pomegranates, I try to schedule the Italian salad which appears on p. 215 of volume I of my cookbook. So you do not have to wait around until the holidays, I thought I would share our favorite recipe for braised fennel; it is fabulous.

## ITALIAN BRAISED FENNEL *AU GRATIN*

# *Finocchio Grattugiato*

TPT - 43 minutes

*As I stood at the checkout in a local grocery store waiting for the cashier to finish ringing up my order, she turned to me and asked me to identify the vegetable she held in her hand. I told her it was fennel or finocchio and that it was often misidentified as anise here in the United States. She looked and looked for it on her computer list and finally said, "I know it's an onion but which one?" That was a first for me and I fought for composure as I explained to this middle-aged woman, once again, the name, the nature of one of our favorite vegetables, and how to prepare it. Fennel is considerably underrated as a raw and cooked vegetable here in the United States. It is so much more flavorful and cleansing than is celery and yet we continuously find guests asking, "What is this?" Rarely do we find anyone like Peter of Blois, who wrote in 1168, that the Sicilians' consumption of celery and fennel would lead to putrefaction of the body, sickness, and death. Fennel's reception by the newly initiated has always been positive, in our experience. Perhaps if Peter, who was expelled from Sicily, presumably for reasons other than his attitude toward raw vegetables, had tasted a dish as simple as this braised fennel, he might have been less harsh in his condemnation.*



**1/2 large bulb fennel—stalks and leaves trimmed,  
tough outer layer removed—cut into four wedges**

**1 cup vegetarian stock of choice**

**1 teaspoon *extra virgin* olive oil**

**1 teaspoon butter—*melted***

**Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

**1 tablespoon grated *pecorino Romano* cheese *or*  
Parmesan cheese, if preferred**

**A fennel leaf frond, for garnish**

Prepare a **6 x 4-inch oblong baking dish** by coating with non-stick lecithin spray coating. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

In a skillet, with cover, set over *MEDIUM-HIGH* heat, bring stock to the boil. *Reduce heat to LOW*. Add fennel wedges. Cover and allow to simmer until the fennel is *crisp-tender*—about 12-15 minutes.

Drain stock from fennel. [Save drained stock for soup preparation.\*] Arrange fennel in prepared *au gratin* dish. Brush each piece of fennel with butter and oil. Season with black pepper. Sprinkle grated cheese evenly over.

Bake in preheated 350 degree F. oven for about 15 minutes, or until cheese is melted and slightly browned.

*Serve at once*, garnished with fresh fennel leaves.

Yields 4 servings  
adequate for 2 people

Notes: \*The stock drained from the braised fennel need not be discarded. It may be frozen to be used at a future time or used as an addition to a soup preparation.

This recipe may be doubled, when required.

1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 0.8 g.; FAT = 2.3 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 0.7 g.;  
CALORIES = 26; CALORIES FROM FAT = 80%

*Jicama* is a starchy, tropical root with a unique texture and taste. It too requires planning. I first discipline myself to buy the smallest *jicama* I can find in my markets. Then I have to decide whether the meals will be Asian or Latin American. A number of recipes which include *jicama* from Indonesia, Brunei, Polynesia, and the Caribbean can be found in volume II of my book. This vegetable is also very popular in Mexico so as I am buying a *jicama* I pick up some watermelon for the Mexican watermelon and *jicama* salad below and some *nopalitas* so that the Mexican prickly pear cactus and *jicama salsa* can be in our menu plans. None of the interesting vegetable will end up on the compost pile from that shopping trip.

## MEXICAN WATERMELON AND JICAMA SALAD

### *Salsa de Sandia y Jicama*

TPT - 6 minutes

*When I was young, pickled vegetables, which we canned during the summer and the fall, served as winter salads and sides for a huge assortment of menus. This is a Middle European custom that traveled to America in the recipe collections of women from many countries. It served us well during the rationing years of World War II. Today few people still can piccalilli, watermelon rind, corn relish, and chow chow. The Amish and the Mennonites here in Pennsylvania continue to can their “sweet and sour” but I imagine that they are notable exceptions. Salsas, that have their origin in cuisines of Latin America, can provide fresh sides that enhance a menu in the same manner. These salsas, unlike the pickles of my childhood, are lower in sodium and add freshness to our tables.*

**3/4 cup diced (1/8 inch) watermelon**  
**1/4 cup diced (1/8 inch) jicama**  
**1 small scallion—white portion only—trimmed,  
well-rinsed, and thinly sliced**  
**2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lime juice**

**Fresh mint leaves, for garnish**

In a mixing bowl, combine diced watermelon and *jicama*, thinly sliced scallion, and lime juice. Toss. Turn into a serving bowl.

Garnish with mint leaves.

Refrigerate until ready to serve. Serve with a slotted spoon.

Yields 1 cupful

Note: This recipe is easily doubled, when required.

1/4 SERVING (i. e., about 1/4 cupful) –  
PROTEIN = 0.4 g.; FAT = 0.1 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 3.7 g.;  
CALORIES = 16; CALORIES FROM FAT = 6%



## MEXICAN PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS AND JICAMA SALSA

# *Salsa de Nopalitos y Jicama*

TPT - 2 hours and 5 minutes;  
2 hours = refrigeration period

*In Mexico and in the Southwestern United States you will find whole nopales, prickly pear cactus “paddles,” in the produce section of grocery stores and pre-cooked nopales in the deli sections. Because you want the smallest and most tender pieces of the prickly pear “paddles” for this dish, it is far better to seek out the canned product. “Nopalitos tiernos al natural” are stripped of spines, peeled, sliced into strips, and packed in water while “nopalitos en vinagre” are prepared in the same manner and then pickled. Either can be used to prepare salads or relishes, such as this.*

**3/4 cup canned nopalitos (sliced prickly pear cactus paddles)—well-drained and diced\***  
**1/2 cup diced peeled jicama\*\***  
**1 small tomato—unpeeled, unseeded, and diced**  
**2 1/2 tablespoons finely chopped onion**  
**2 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves**  
**1 1/2 tablespoons herb vinegar, of choice, or red wine vinegar, if preferred**  
**1 1/2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil**  
**1 garlic clove—very finely chopped**  
**1/4 teaspoon jalapeño sauce, or to taste\*\*\***

In a mixing bowl, combine all ingredients. Stir to coat each vegetable piece well. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours to allow for flavors to meld. Stir the *salsa* every 30 minutes, or so, to insure even marination.

*Serve well-chilled.*

Yields about 2 1/4 cupfuls

Notes: \**Nopalitos*, the smallest and most tender prickly pear cactus paddles, are sliced and jarred by several firms in Arizona and California. They are available in Hispanic groceries, food specialty stores, and in groceries throughout the Southwest.

\*\**Jicama*, if not available from your grocery store, may be found in both South American and Asian groceries.

\*\*\**Jalapeño* sauce is available in specialty food stores, Hispanic markets, and in grocery stores in the Southwest. Since fresh *chilies* are not always available, this widely available sauce is suggested as a substitute.

If you use “*nopalitos tiernos al natural*,” you may find that you need to season the *salsa* with a bit of salt. “*Nopalitos en vinagre*” are generally prepared with salt.

This recipe can be doubled but since it tastes best when it is freshly made, it is often a better plan to make a smaller quantity. It will keep, however, in the refrigerator for several days.

1/5 SERVING (i. e., 1/4 cupful) –  
PROTEIN = 0.5 g.; FAT = 1.2 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 4.0 g.;  
CALORIES = 29; CALORIES FROM FAT = 37%



*This month we salvaged a celery root,  
that might have languished in the vegetable drawer of the refrigerator,  
with a classic rémoulade sauce  
If you eat eggs, drop by next month.  
I'll share some interesting ways to incorporate egg protein into your vegetarian diet.*

*Judy*

Please note that all food value calculations are approximate and not the result of chemical analysis.

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