

Eggplant Muffaletta

Ripe & Ready | May 2006



The Barbecue Joint in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, serves these vegetarian muffaletta sandwiches using local fresh mozzarella that has been smoked, but any mozzarella—smoked or plain—will work. Roast your own sweet peppers from the farmers market (see our instructions, below) or use bottled.

- 1/2 CUP ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR**
- 1 EGG, BEATEN**
- 1/2 CUP MILK**
- 3/4 CUP SEASONED FINE DRY BREAD CRUMBS**
- 1/2 OF A SMALL EGGPLANT, CUT LENGTHWISE INTO FOUR 1/4-INCH-THICK SLICES**
- SALT AND FRESHLY GROUND BLACK PEPPER**
- 1/4 CUP COOKING OIL**
- 1 BOULE (ROUND ITALIAN LOAF), CUT IN HALF HORIZONTALLY**
- 1 RECIPE OLIVE DRESSING**
- 1 CUP ROASTED SWEET RED PEPPERS*, CUT INTO STRIPS**
- 4 OZ. SLICED, SMOKED FRESH MOZZARELLA CHEESE OR FRESH MOZZARELLA CHEESE**

In a shallow dish place flour. In another shallow dish stir together egg and milk. In a third shallow dish place bread crumbs. Sprinkle eggplant slices with salt and black pepper. Dredge eggplant slices in the flour, then in the egg-and-milk mixture, then in the bread crumbs to coat.

In a very large skillet cook eggplant slices in hot oil over medium-high heat for 3 minutes or until eggplant is golden brown, turning once. Drain on paper towels.

Place bread loaf halves on a large baking sheet, cut sides up. Slather cut sides with *Olive Dressing*. Top bottom of bread with fried eggplant and roasted red pepper strips. Top with cheese slices. Bake halves in a 350° oven until cheese is bubbly. Assemble two sections and cut into wedges to serve. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

OLIVE DRESSING: In a mixing bowl combine 3/4 cup pitted and finely chopped kalamata olives, 1/2 cup chopped pimiento-stuffed green olives, 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley, 2 tablespoons finely chopped red onion, 1 tablespoon finely chopped capers, 2 teaspoons chopped fresh oregano, and 2 cloves minced fresh garlic. Mix well. Cover and chill, up to 24 hours, before serving. Makes 1 1/2 cups.

***TO ROAST SWEET PEPPERS:** Halve peppers lengthwise. Remove stems, seeds, and membranes. Place peppers, cut side down, on a foil-lined baking sheet. Bake in a 425° oven for 20 to 25 minutes or until skins are blistered and dark. Carefully bring the foil up and around the peppers to enclose. Let stand 15 minutes or until cool enough to handle. Use a sharp knife to loosen the edges of the skins and gently and slowly pull off in strips. Discard skins.