

Grilled Ratatouille

Serves 4 to 6

Ratatouille, the famed French vegetable ragout, is traditionally simmered on top of the stove. Here, the vegetables are grilled, which intensifies the flavor of each and brings them all together in a deliciously smoky finish. The grill marks visible on the vegetables contribute to an eye-catching presentation.

Ingredients

4 garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 1/8 tsp. plus 1/2 tsp. salt
1 large globe eggplant, about 1 1/2 lb., cut into slices 1/2 inch thick
Canola oil for brushing
1 large yellow onion, cut crosswise into rounds 1/4 to 1/2 inch thick
1/8 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
2 large red bell peppers
2 zucchini, about 1 lb. total, halved lengthwise
3 large tomatoes, about 1 lb. total, halved crosswise
1/2 cup fresh basil leaves
1/4 tsp. red pepper flakes

Directions

In a small saucepan over low heat, combine the garlic and olive oil. Heat until small bubbles surround the garlic cloves and they turn golden brown, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and let stand for 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove the garlic and discard it. Set the infused oil aside. Sprinkle 1 tsp. of the salt over both sides of the eggplant slices. Place a large colander in the sink and add the eggplant. Let drain for at least 30 minutes or up to 1 hour. Lightly brush a 12-inch square of aluminum foil with canola oil and arrange the onion slices in their original sequence to make a relatively round sphere in the center of the foil. Drizzle the slices with 2 tsp. of the garlic oil, 1/8 tsp. of the salt and the black pepper. Enclose the onion in the foil. Set aside. Working with 1 bell pepper at a time and using a paring knife, cut around the stem and discard it. Cut a long slit down the side of the pepper, then open it up so it lies flat. Cut 1/2 inch from the top and bottom. Cut out and discard the ribs and seeds. Rinse the eggplant slices well under cold running water and pat dry with paper towels. Arrange the eggplant, zucchini, bell peppers and tomatoes on a baking sheet. Prepare a charcoal or gas grill with 2 areas of high heat and 1 cooler area. Lightly oil the grill rack. Place the onion over the cooler area of the grill. Place the bell peppers, skin down, over the hottest part of the grill and cook until the skins are blackened, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer the peppers to a bowl and let cool. Brush the eggplant, zucchini and tomatoes on both sides with half of the remaining garlic oil. Place the tomatoes, cut sides up, on the grill and cook until the skins blister,

about 3 minutes. Turn them over and cook just until the cut sides are nicely grill-marked, about 2 minutes more. Transfer to a platter. Grill the eggplant and zucchini, turning once, until nicely grill-marked and tender when pierced with a knife, about 8 minutes total. Transfer to the platter. Carefully unwrap the onion and test for doneness with a paring knife; it should pierce the onion easily, but the onion should not be too soft. If the slices are still tough, rewrap them in the foil and continue cooking for 2 to 3 minutes. Remove the onion from the foil and transfer to the platter. Transfer the grilled vegetables to a cutting board. Pour any juices from the platter into a large bowl. Peel off and discard the blistered skins from the peppers and tomatoes. Using a chef's knife, chop the peppers, tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini and onion into 1/2- to 3/4-inch chunks and place in the bowl. Tear the basil leaves into small pieces and add them to the bowl. Add the red pepper flakes, the remaining garlic oil and the 1/2 tsp. salt and stir gently. Let stand for 20 minutes to allow the flavors to come together. The ratatouille can be served at room temperature. To serve it hot, transfer the ratatouille to a large fry pan, place over medium heat and heat, stirring occasionally, until just warmed through, about 5 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasonings with salt, black pepper and red pepper flakes. Serve immediately.

Chef's tip: Infused oils are a great way to add flavor to vegetables. Homemade versions are best when used the day they are made, as they do not refrigerate well.

-OurLocaltopia 2013-



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