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Ratatouille

Ratatouille is a traditional comfort food from the Provence region of France and is made with zucchini, eggplant, tomatoes, bell peppers, onion, garlic, and fresh basil. It's perfect to make this time of year because it uses vegetables that are so abundant right now in our home gardens and Farmer's Markets.

It's a dish that is simple to prepare, allows for plenty of creativity (you can vary the amounts of ingredients depending on your personal preferences), packed with healthy good-for-you veggies, and only gets better after a day or two in the refrigerator.

2 small Japanese eggplants
2 small zucchini
2 small yellow crookneck squash
2 small red, yellow, or orange bell peppers
1 medium yellow onion

4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
1 cup diced Roma tomatoes (I leave the seeds in and the peels on but you can deseed and peel the tomatoes if you want to do that.)
¼ cup water

2 teaspoons minced fresh garlic

Salt and pepper

1/2 cup finely chopped fresh basil leaves

- Cut eggplants, zucchinis, yellow squashes, bell peppers, and onion into 1/2-inch dice.
- In a large heavy skillet cook eggplant in 1 tablespoon oil over moderate heat, stirring, until tender and slightly browned on the edges. Transfer to a bowl.
- In the same skillet add 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and cook zucchini and yellow squash, over moderate heat, until tender and slightly browned on the edges. Transfer to the bowl with the eggplant.
- In the same skillet, add one tablespoon of the olive oil and cook the bell peppers until they are tender and slightly brown around the edges. Transfer to the eggplant mixture bowl.
- In the same skillet, add the remaining tablespoon of the olive oil and cook the onions until they are tender and slightly brown around the edges.
- Deglaze the skillet with the tomatoes and the water.
- Add the garlic to the tomatoes and salt and pepper to taste. Cook, stirring constantly, for one minute. Transfer to bowl with eggplant mixture.
- Gently stir all vegetables with a rubber spatula to blend.
- Let the ratatouille sit, covered, for an hour.

- Sprinkle with the fresh basil and serve at room temperature.

Serves 4.

Note: Ratatouille is a delicious side dish for any grilled meats, chicken, and even scrambled eggs. A tablespoon or two of it makes a great omelet filling. Try serving the ratatouille over whole wheat ziti, whole wheat couscous, or brown rice. It also makes a nice appetizer served on crackers or grilled bread.

Victoria Wesseler

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