



MANZO E MELANZANE SOTT'OLIO

Peasant sauces are pleasant sauces. Based on the provincial Neapolitan aglio e olio, my Manzo e Melanzane Sott'olio (or, Beef and Eggplant in Oil) is a result of wanting to make a rustic sauce using beef (kindly refer to my Mapo Doufo recipe and video should you want context), in addition to keeping it rough and ready with few ingredients to prepare. Lots of extra virgin and garlic serves as its base. Steaming the aubergine before frying keeps the spongy fruit from absorbing the oil. And, adding lean ground beef – not a lot – doesn't overpower, or bring blandness to the sauce, but instead takes on the flavor of the sparse seasonings used. I finish with cherry tomatoes for a burst of freshness and acidity. This being an oil-based sauce, I chose my Gnudi Brutto for my pasta. The two cheeses used to make these tender but hearty dumplings are the perfect addition to this rich but delicate sugo.

PREP/COOK TIME: 15 Minutes

Makes to 2 Servings (Gnudi Brutto) / 4 Servings (Pasta)

INGREDIENTS

¼ Cup – Extra Virgin Olive Oil

4 – Baby Japanese Eggplant, or Two Medium, Cubed

2 Tsp – Kosher Salt, Plus One Pinch

½ Lb – 80% Lean Ground Beef

1 Tb – Paprika

1 Tb – Finely Grated Garlic, or 3 Large Cloves Finely Minced

1 Tsp – Crushed Red Pepper

½ Tsp – Coarse Black Pepper

1 Whole Bay Leaf

½ Pint (5 Oz) – Petite Cherry Tomatoes, Halved

1 Gnudi Brutto Recipe, Small Dumplings, or

1 Lb – Penne Rigate or Spaghetti No. 9, Cooked per Instructions (But Half the Water)

Whole Milk Ricotta Cheese, for Garnish

Grated Pecorino Romano, for Garnish

THE NITTY GRITTY

Place cubed eggplant in a microwavable bowl with a pinch of salt and splash of water; cover tightly with cling film and microwave on high for 5 minutes. Remove bowl carefully from microwave (it will be hot) as you should when taking off cling film to allow steam to escape. Transfer eggplant to a plate lined with paper towels to absorb any watery excess.

In a large non-stick pan, heat olive oil at medium high. Once oil starts to shimmer, add eggplant (sputtering may occur). Add 1 Tsp salt and stir 'to coat.' Cook eggplant for about 2 minutes or till edges appear to get golden. Crumble beef into pan; add paprika, garlic, black pepper and remaining teaspoon of salt and stir to combine till paprika is completely blended. Add bay leaf, cover and reduce heat to medium and simmer for 3 – 4 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Using a slotted spoon, add gnudi to sauce and stir; cook for another 2 minutes allowing the dumplings to sop up some sauce.

For pasta; drain pasta and return back to pot. Add sauce to pasta; toss to combine. Cook at medium heat for 2 – 3 minutes.

Remove bay leaf; add cherry tomatoes and give a light toss before serving.

Garnish with a dollop of ricotta and Pecorino Romano and serve.