***Berendjenas Rellenas kon Keso***

**Eggplants with Smoky Cheese Filling**

By Viviane Bowell

Makes 8 servings as a main dish

4 medium eggplants

3 tablespoons sunflower or other neutral vegetable oil

2 medium onions, finely chopped

1/3 cup chopped parsley (flat-leaf or curly)

Juice of 1/2 lemon

1 teaspoon tomato paste

1⁄2 teaspoon smoked paprika, or to taste

1⁄2 teaspoon ground turmeric (optional)

1⁄2 cup water

Salt

4 ounces (1 cup) feta cheese, crumbled

1 cup ricotta cheese

3⁄4 cup shredded cheddar or similar mature cheese

2/3 cup fine matzah meal or bread crumbs

**Topping**

3⁄4 cup mozzarella cheese (shredded or sliced)

1/3 cup shredded cheddar or similar mature cheese

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

For the eggplant (also called aubergines in England), cut each one in half lengthwise.

Carefully scoop out the pulp, leaving about a 1-inch shell; you can use a melon baller,

or a small teaspoon and a sharp knife works well. It doesn’t have to be a work of art

because whatever pulp is left will soften in the oven and be covered by filling.

Place the eggplant pulp in a bowl and squeeze out all the (bitter) juices. You may

have to do this twice.

Place the eggplant shells on a large rimmed baking sheet, cover with foil, and bake

for about 10 minutes. Uncover and bake for another 5 minutes. The shells should

be soft to handle, but not so soft that they can’t hold their shape. Remove from the

oven and allow to cool. Leave the oven on.

For the filling, heat oil in a large pan over medium heat. Add the chopped onions

and cook until starting to turn golden brown, 4 to 6 minutes. Add the eggplant

pulp, chopped parsley, and stir well. Add the lemon juice, tomato paste, smoked

paprika, and ground turmeric, if using. Stir well until all the ingredients are

mixed, then add the water. Cover and simmer for about 12 minutes. Uncover,

taste, and add salt as needed. Stir, then cook, uncovered, for another 2 or 3

minutes, or until all the water has been absorbed. Remove from the heat.

When cool, tip the pulp mixture into a bowl. Add the matzah meal or bread crumbs

and the feta, ricotta, shredded cheeses and additional smoked paprika to taste if

desired. Mix to blend well. Stuff the par-baked eggplant shells with equal amounts

of the pulp mixture, and place them on a lightly oiled rimmed baking sheet.

For the topping, cover each stuffed eggplant with half of each, the mozzarella and

the cheddar or mature cheese. Cover loosely with foil and bake for about 15

minutes. Uncover, top with the remaining cheeses and bake for another 5 minutes,

or until golden on top.

*Writer and chef Viviane Bowell is the author of two books about her family’s experience*

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