

Lebanese Baked Eggplant, Sheik al Mehshee

a recipe from www.maureenabood.com

2 medium-sized globe eggplant
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons butter
½ cup pine nuts
1 pound ground beef or lamb
1 medium onion, coarsely chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
¼ teaspoon pepper
1 28 oz. can tomato sauce
1 cup shredded fresh mozzarella cheese (optional)

Cut eggplant in half crosswise, then cut lengthwise in ½ inch slices. Brush both sides of eggplant slices lightly with olive oil. Arrange on a baking sheet and broil eggplant in batches until deep mahogany brown, turning once to brown both sides.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

In a small frying pan, melt 1 tablespoon of butter. Add the pine nuts and cook until golden brown, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and set aside.

In a medium sauté pan, melt butter over medium low heat. Add chopped onion and cook over medium heat until translucent, stirring occasionally. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, about a minute. Add the ground beef, breaking up the meat with a spoon. Season with salt, cinnamon, and pepper. Cook until meat is medium-well done, continuing to break up the meat into small pieces with a spoon.

Butter or spray a 9x13x2-inch baking or similar sized gratin dish with oil. Spread about ½ cup of tomato sauce in bottom of dish. Place eggplant slices over the sauce, covering as much surface area of the bottom of the dish as possible. Spoon ½ of the meat evenly over the eggplant and pour half of the remaining tomato sauce over the meat. Sprinkle with half of the pine nuts. Repeat, layering eggplant, meat, pine nuts, and tomato sauce. Finish with a layer of eggplant and cover with more tomato sauce. Note that this can be done in two layers of eggplant if you prefer (or if you don't have enough eggplant for three layers of it) by making a layer of eggplant and nuts, then meat, then eggplant and nuts on top.

Pour enough water along the sides of the dish to fill the gratin almost to the top (about 1/2-inch from the top). This is an important step or your sauce will be too thick.

Cover tightly with foil and bake for 1 ½ hours. Remove foil and sprinkle with mozzarella cheese, if using. Bake for about ½ hour longer, uncovered, until cheese is bubbling and golden.

Remove from oven and serve immediately with rice, Lebanese pita bread, and a crisp Romaine salad.