KALI OREXI

sharing our Greek culinary heritage

Christina's Vegetarian Moussaka

Preparing the vegetable sauce

You will need...

1kg eggplants

Small bunch mint – washed

Small bunch parsley – washed

3 large brown onions

6 cloves garlic

1kg mushrooms – 500g to be processed finely and 500g to be sliced and both added to vegetable sauce

1.2kg extra ripe tomatoes – stalks removed

2½ teaspoons salt

1½ teaspoons pepper

1½ soup spoons oregano

1 cup extra virgin olive oil (EVOO)

How to prepare the vegetable sauce...

- Peel the eggplants; cut them into large chunks; place them in a water bath; and set them aside
- Coarsely chop the herbs and chop the onions into large chunks
- Place the herbs, onions and garlic in a food processor and pulse them until they look as though they have been finely chopped. (Do not over-process them, as they will have a mushy texture) Place them in a large pot
- Place half of the mushrooms in the food processor and again pulse them until they look as though they have been finely chopped. Add them to the pot
- Slice the remaining mushrooms to about ¼ - ½cm in thickness. Add them to the pot
- In small batches, remove the eggplants from the water bath; pat them dry; place them in the food processor; and process them using a pulsing action till they appear finely chopped. Add them to the pot
- Coarsely chop the tomatoes; puree them in the food processor; and set them aside
- Place the pot on medium to high heat, add and stir through the EVOO, salt, pepper and oregano

- Sautee the vegetables until they reduce and brown a little
- Add and stir through the tomato puree. Bring the ingredients to a 'boil' and then immediately reduce them to a simmer. Continue to simmer the vegetable sauce, occasionally checking and stirring the pot, until all the fluids in the pot have reduced

Preparing the vegetables for layering

You will need...

1kg eggplants

1kg zucchini

2kg potatoes – peeled

EVOO

How to prepare the vegetables for layering...

- Top and tail the eggplants; slice them lengthways to ½cm in thickness; place them in a fresh water bath; and set them aside
- Top and tail the zucchini and slice them lengthways to ½cm in thickness
- Slice the potatoes lengthways to ½cm in thickness
- Remove the eggplant slices from the water bath and pat them dry
- Place a fry pan (or two) on medium to high heat and add ½ - 1cm of EVOO
- Place the eggplants, zucchini and potatoes in turn in the fry pan(s) in a single layer
- Lightly brown the vegetable slices on one side; turn them over and brown them on the other side; and then remove them from the fry pan and place them on a platter lined with absorbent paper. (The vegetable slices do not need to cook all the way through.)
- Add more oil to the fry pan as you go, as the vegetable slices absorb oil as they fry and reduce the amount in the pan
- Don't forget to keep an eye on the vegetable sauce as it's reducing

Assembling the moussaka

You will need...

Your pot with the prepared vegetable sauce

The platter of fried vegetable slices

80g grated kefalogavriera cheese

Salt

How to assemble the moussaka...

- Place a single layer of potato slices across the base of a deep baking dish; lightly season them with salt; and cover them sparingly with the grated cheese
- Spoon about a quarter of the vegetable sauce evenly on top
- Add a single layer of zucchini slices to the baking dish; lightly season these with salt; and cover them sparingly with the grated cheese too
- Spoon about a quarter of the original amount of vegetable sauce evenly on top again
- Add a single layer of eggplant slices to the baking dish; lightly season these with salt; cover them sparingly with the grated cheese; and spoon vegetable sauce evenly on top, just as before
- Place the remaining mixed vegetable slices in a single layer in the baking dish; season them with salt; sprinkle them with the remaining cheese; and spoon the remaining sauce on top
- Set the baking dish aside

Preparing the béchamel sauce

You will need...

1.5litres full fat milk

4 eggs

50g butter

1 – 1½ teaspoons salt

185g self-raising flour – sifted

300g kefalogavriera cheese

How to prepare the béchamel sauce...

- Place a large, deep pot on medium heat and add the milk, eggs, butter and salt
- Gently stir
- Once the butter has melted, add the flour
- Continuously stir the mixture until it thickens evenly
- Add the grated cheese and mix it through
- Pour and spread the béchamel sauce evenly on top of the moussaka

Baking the Moussaka

- Bake the moussaka at 170°C for about an hour
- Keep an eye on it as it bakes; if any areas over-brown, just place a piece of foil on top of that area

Serving the Moussaka

- Ideally you should allow the moussaka to rest for an hour or more before serving so that all the layers firm up and you are able to serve it as a regularly shaped slice. The flavours will also have a chance to better come together
- If you don't have the time or the patience to wait, just go for it and enjoy!

Christina's Vegetarian Moussaka – Key Points

- Use over-ripe, soft tomatoes as they have more flavour
- It is optional to peel the eggplants used in the vegetable sauce. If you're not trying to disguise them for children, then keep the skin on
- Christina likes to place the eggplants in a water bath so that they release their 'brown stain.' I feel this is a habit of old, from a time when eggplants were often a little bitter and had to be salted and allowed to rest in order to leach out some of the bitterness and then washed well. These days eggplants no longer have that bitterness, so I feel this step is optional too
- When chopping the ingredients in a food processor, use a pulsing action so you can control the amount of processing more easily. Make sure not to over-process the ingredients, as they will turn into mush and that is not the right texture for the moussaka filling – it needs to have a little body to it, a little complexity. If you don't have a food processor, you will have a little work to do to finely chop all of the ingredients
- The moussaka vegetable sauce can be made ahead, the day before for example, to reduce the cooking load on the day you complete and serve the moussaka. Just reheat it a little, before layering it in the moussaka
- When frying the vegetables for layering, you may want to go completely Greek and line the surrounds of your cooking area with foil to 'collect' the oil spray that invariably occurs when frying. This will help reduce some of the clean up
- When frying the vegetable slices, you do not need to cook them all the way through, because they will be layered in the moussaka and will be baked at 170°C for an hour too
- Remember to add more oil to the fry pan(s) as the amount reduces when the vegetable slices are absorbing oil as they fry
- Kefalogavriera is available from any Greek deli. Alternatively, you can use tasty cheese if kefalogavriera is not readily available or you are on a budget
- Leftover moussaka can be refrigerated and slices can be reheated and served for at least 3-4 days (if it lasts)
- Halve the ingredient quantities if you wish to make a smaller sized moussaka