

Carmen-Sibha Keiso recalling a baked dish to accompany Kit Fitzgerald,
from one video artist to another... (ideal for meat eaters, but also not limited to !)

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Maldoum , pronounced maal-thdoum, in a way.

Try to say Maldoum with a heavy lisp.

It's an Assyrian / Armenian dish, ideal for the mountain / desert.

A substantial winter meal.

For a standard deep baking tray serve (approx 4) it requires...

1lb / ½ kilo of beef mince, 80/20 meat to fat is good

2 eggplants / aubergines

4 tomatoes

2-4 potatoes

1-2 medium red/brown onion

One can of pureed tomato / tomato paste

To season mince:

Small handful of fresh finely cut parsley / mint (not essential)

½ teaspoon of each; salt, coriander, paprika, cumin, white/black pepper,

allspice/nutmeg/cinnamon, sumac (all ultimately optional)

To eat/serve with:

Flatbread / Mountain bread / whatever's around

In a way, we can call this a Syrian/desert ratatouille. The rows are quite similar, but not as finicky.

This is after all a dish to be prepared, eaten and broken down with your grubby hands.

OK first of all, you want to buy some eggplants, or as you may call them aubergines.

Big, dark purple and light. The more air inside the better. I can't say why - perhaps that signifies less moisture (we will be salting them later). Then, buy some nice juicy tomatoes, the more flavour a tomato has the tastier the residual broth will be, ruffled tomatoes are always good. Or pick whatever type you like, as long as they're medium-large in size. Then grab a few potatoes, ideally red skin potatoes because they don't crumble when baked. If you don't have all the dried herbs mentioned above, don't fret, a little of whatever is good to enhance the flavour of the mince. Salt according to your needs.

Now... the prep... **Eggplants first;** we like to peel a few strips of the skin off before slicing, to ensure the interior sponge absorbs a decent amount of flavour. So the eggplant looks like a zebra with 4 white stripes. Then we slice it into 1cm wide circular prisms. If the pieces get really big, we will cut them in half during assemblage. Once they are sliced, **disperse them evenly on a flat plate and salt heavily.** We want as much moisture to come out of these while we prepare the remainder of the ingredients. Occasionally tipping out any water/moisture that seeps out. Some will pan-fry the eggplant slices before layering, but that's too much oil in my books. The fat from the mince should suffice in sizzling the herbs. **Then tomatoes, potatoes and onion** are sliced in a similar vein, the aim being to make every component similar in thickness/diameter in order to create the snake... separate each ingredient into its own plate to assist in creating the even ratio. At this stage, and using our hands, we open the can on tomato paste and smear a tablespoon or two over the potato and onion. Sort of a lubricating process. Now your **minced beef or lamb**, if you have a preference, will be popped into a mixing bowl; fresh and dried herbs added and combined with your wet hands, it is essential that everything be well minced and integrated so we can form easy mini-paddies for layering. Wet hands make it easy for forming the meat and avoiding its fat to stick to your skin. It would be a good time to **preheat your oven; 200c / 400f** should do the trick.

The Forming... as follows; starting with a slice of tomato on the edge of the dish (to create a moisture barrier), then meat, onion, eggplant, meat, potato, tomato, meat, eggplant, onion, tomato... and so fourth... Ultimately you can layer this however you feel is balanced. The important part being that the mince acts as a binder for the vegetables. It will help keep everything glued together, as well as disperse flavour, moisture, and cooking time evenly. Once you've created several rows, ideally filling out the dish tray so everything is compact. Feel free to shove the last bits in there sideways, jamming and compressing the meat isn't a big issue. **Grab the remaining tomato puree/** paste, fill the empty half with water and swirl around. I like to add paprika and black pepper to this mix, we then drizzle this puree mixture over the rows, **cover the tray with aluminium foil** to retain moisture and slot into the middle or top rack of the oven. Baking should take 40 minutes max, I cook for 30, take the aluminium off and let it roast a little for the remaining 10-15 minutes.

Please see pictures bellow ::



