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by Liz Robb

Roasted Mediterranean vegetable pasta bake



Ingredients

3 tablespoons of olive oil
2 small aubergines
3 courgettes
1 red onion
1 red pepper
1 yellow pepper
Salt and freshly milled black pepper
1 small white onion
3 cloves of garlic
1 tablespoon of tomato puree
1 tablespoon of brown sugar
400g can of chopped tomatoes
340g fusilli pasta
1 thick slice of wholemeal bread
100g mature cheddar cheese

Preparation

1. 1. Preheat the oven to 200 degrees, 180 degrees fan oven.
2. 2. Prepare the vegetables. Wash and chop the aubergines and courgettes into fairly large chunks. Peel the red onion and chop it into wedges, then separate some of the layers. Wash, deseed and chop the peppers into largish chunks too. The vegetable pieces will shrink in the oven as they cook, so don't cut them too small.
3. 3. Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large roasting tin in the oven for a few minutes. Then add the chopped vegetables, stir them to mix and coat with the oil, season well with salt and black pepper then roast for 30-40 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. 4. Now make the tomato sauce. Chop the small white onion very finely. Heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a saucepan and fry the onion over a low heat, stirring occasionally, for 5-10 minutes until soft but not browned. Add 3 cloves of garlic, crushed, and cook gently for a further 5 minutes. Stir in a heaped tablespoon of tomato puree, a level tablespoon of brown sugar, then a 400g can of chopped tomatoes. Add 2 tablespoons of water and season well with salt and black pepper. Simmer over a low heat, stirring occasionally, for about 20 minutes.
5. 5. To make the topping, break a thick slice of wholemeal bread into pieces and drop into a food processor. Chop the cheese into pieces and add to the bread. Whizz them together until the mix looks like breadcrumbs.
6. 6. Just before everything else is ready, cook the pasta for 6-7 minutes in a large pan of boiling salted water, then drain. It needs to be slightly undercooked because it will finish cooking in the oven.

7 I used fusilli because the shape of the pieces seems to coat well with the sauce, but you can use any type of chunky pasta that you have.

8 7. When the vegetables are soft and roasted, tip them into the drained pasta, making sure to scrape the juices and the roasty bits from the bottom of the tin. Add the tomato sauce and stir well to mix without breaking the vegetables. Pour the mixture into an oven proof dish and sprinkle the topping evenly on the top.

9 8. Return to the oven and bake for about another 15 minutes, or until the topping is golden brown. You can hasten this by popping it under the grill for a few moments at the end if you wish.

10 This recipe is really versatile, and can be adapted to use up most vegetables you have lurking in the fridge, or a glut of seasonal vegetables. Or simply to accommodate the likes and dislikes of your family

11 pasta cooked for my small daughter usually had to contain sweetcorn!

12 Here are a few ideas for adaptations: For those wanting an even lower fat version, use sweetener to replace sugar in the sauce, and omit the topping and the final bake. Just stir in some fresh basil leaves and serve with a crisp green salad.

13 For a more luxurious version, replace the topping with creamy fresh mozzarella and grated parmesan, and serve with buttery garlic bread.

14 If you like heat, add chopped chilli to the onion when you make the tomato sauce, or add chillies to the roasted vegetables.

15 Meat lovers might want to add slices of chicken or spicy sausage, or serve this dish as an accompaniment to grilled meat.

16 Try toasting pine nuts to add another flavour to the topping.

Cooks Note

This delicious and colourful pasta dish is one of our family favourites for a simple weekday meal that is tasty and filling but without too many calories.

Using a good variety of fresh, juicy vegetables means that it is packed with vitamins, and the pasta will satisfy healthy appetites. The usual melted cheese topping is replaced with a mixture of cheese and wholemeal breadcrumbs to give an added crunch and, at the same time, lower the fat content.

This amount will make 6 small portions or 4 generous portions. If you have any left over, it is good served cold with a salad, or it will freeze and reheat very well.