

Saksuka (Fried Eggplant in Tomato Sauce)

Turkish · Appetizer · Medium · 60 min total · Serves 4

Saksuka is fried eggplant and peppers simmered in a garlicky tomato sauce until silky. Eaten warm or cold as a meze, it is a summer classic where the vegetables are fried first to keep their shape.

Ingredients

- 2 medium eggplant (cut into 1-inch cubes and salted to draw out moisture)
- 2 medium green bell pepper (seeded and cut into strips; Turkish sivri peppers are the authentic choice)
- 1 medium yellow onion (thinly sliced)
- 4 cloves garlic (thinly sliced)
- 3 medium ripe tomatoes (grated on the large holes of a box grater, skins discarded)
- 2 tbsp tomato paste (biber salçası (red pepper paste) is traditional; tomato paste plus 1 tsp paprika is the swap)
- 0.5 cup vegetable oil (neutral, for frying; the eggplant will absorb much of it)
- 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil (for the onion and garlic)
- 0.5 tsp pul biber (optional; or red pepper flakes)
- 0.5 tsp fine sea salt (split between the eggplant and the sauce)
- 2 tbsp flat-leaf parsley (chopped, for finishing)

Method

1. Put the eggplant cubes in a colander, toss with about 1/4 teaspoon of the salt, and rest for 20 minutes. Pat the cubes dry with paper towels.
2. Heat about 3 tablespoons of the vegetable oil in a wide skillet over medium-high until a piece of eggplant sizzles immediately, about 350°F (175°C). Fry the eggplant in batches for 4 to 5 minutes, turning, until golden and tender, adding oil as needed. Drain on paper towels.
3. Fry the pepper strips in the same oil for about 3 minutes until blistered in spots and softened. Drain them on paper towels.
4. Pour off the frying oil, leaving 1 tablespoon in the pan, and add the olive oil and onion. Cook over medium for 6 to 8 minutes until soft and golden at the edges, then stir in the garlic for 1 minute without letting it brown.
5. Stir in the tomato paste and cook for 2 minutes until it turns brick-red. Add the grated tomatoes, pul biber and the remaining salt, and simmer for 10 minutes until the sauce is thick and saucy.
6. Return the eggplant and peppers to the pan, fold gently, cover, and simmer over low heat for 10 minutes until the eggplant is completely tender and the sauce clings to it.
7. Stir in the parsley. Serve warm or at room temperature with bread or yogurt, or chill it and serve cold.