

Patlıcan zeytinyağlı **(aubergine cooked with olive oil)**



The aubergine must be the Turks' favourite vegetable. It is prepared 100 different ways and features in appetizers, mains and even desserts. The zeytinyağlı method of cooking is common in western Turkey, along the Aegean coast where olive oil is plentiful.

This delicious dish could be served as an appetizer, lunch dish or accompaniment to meat. In Turkey it would be a meze, with which you would drink rakı turned cloudy with water. The recipe comes from the wonderful Zeliha Irez, who runs a superb guesthouse in the hills east of Istanbul.

1kg small, young aubergines with perfect shiny skins

salt

olive oil

½ kg tomatoes, peeled* and chopped

300g green peppers, bell or gypsy, seeded and sliced quite thinly

one whole garlic clove, peeled

1 tsp sugar

1. Using a vegetable peeler remove lengthwise strips of skin from aubergines, so that they are alternately striped white and purple. Soak them in heavily-salted water for one hour, then rinse.
2. Drizzle some olive oil in a large, straight-sided sauté pan (which has a lid, preferably a see-through one). Place aubergines side-by-side snugly in the pan. (If they're really fat you could cut them into quarters lengthwise so that they fit, but it's better to use small, narrow aubergines if possible.) Drizzle with more olive oil.
3. Cover and cook over medium heat until aubergines sizzle. Reduce heat to low and cook a further 25 mins.
4. Carefully turn aubergines over, increase heat to medium and cook again until they sizzle.
5. Add peppers, tomatoes, garlic, sugar, salt and pepper. Cook again, covered, over low heat for 45 mins. By this point all vegetables should be sweet and tender and the aubergines practically collapsed.
6. Let cool and serve room temperature as an appetizer.

* To peel tomatoes:

- Bring a pan of water to the boil.
- Using a paring knife scoop out the cores of the tomatoes.
- Blanch tomatoes for 15 seconds to a minute, or until their skins start to peel away.

- Immediately lift out tomatoes and plunge in cold water to cool.
- Pull off skins – it should be easy.