

CAPONATA WITH GARLIC TOASTS

Serves 6 to 8.

4 lbs. globe eggplants, peeled and cut into 3/4-inch cubes

Salt for sprinkling eggplant

Olive oil and/or grapeseed oil for frying

1 1/4 cups chopped onion

1 1/4 cups chopped celery

1/2 cup capers, rinsed and drained

1/2 cup pitted green olives, quartered

1 T. olive oil

1/2 cup or 1-6 oz. can tomato paste

1/4 cup sugar

1/4 cup red wine vinegar

Salt and pepper to taste

1/4 cup coarsely chopped toasted slivered almonds

2 T. chopped fresh mint or parsley

Garlic Toasts

1. If the eggplant seeds are large and dark toss cubes with salt in a colander and let stand for about 30 minutes. Rinse well, drain and dry the eggplant cubes. If there are very few seeds or they are pale then it is not necessary to salt the eggplant.

2. Heat about 1 1/2 cups oil in a saucepan; cook the eggplant in batches for 5 to 6 minutes. Drain eggplant on paper towels and then arrange on a platter or in a casserole.

3. Blanch the celery for 2 minutes in boiling water, remove with a slotted spoon and then blanch the onions for 3 to 4 minutes in the same boiling water until just tender; drain well. Blanch the olives and capers; drain well.

4. Heat the 1 T. olive oil in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add celery, onions, olives and capers and cook, stirring often for 2 minutes. Stir in the tomato paste; increase the heat a bit and cook, stirring constantly to lightly brown the paste. Stir in the sugar and then the wine vinegar and cook for 2 to 3 minutes to dissolve the sugar. Season to taste with salt and lots of pepper.

5. Pour the tomato mixture over the eggplant and let it cool; toss ingredients together. Serve sprinkled with almonds and mint or parsley. Serve with Garlic Toasts—baguette slices which have been brushed with a garlic infused olive oil and toasted.