



Aubergine Genie

A dozen magical ways to grill an eggplant.

By MARK BITTMAN

you learn the various ways to grill an eggplant, you've pretty much mastered the grill. Because the eggplant (which, like the tomato, is technically a fruit) is among the most universally beloved summer vegetables precisely because it may be grilled in almost any form, over almost any heat, with spectacular results.

Real charcoal is best, but all these recipes can be cooked over gas (or the dread briquettes) — if you have the patience — wood. Build a hot fire, and toss the eggplant on whole. The skin will blister, blacken and burst, and the interior will become dreamy and creamy. (If

you practice, you can hold it by its stem and peel the charred skin right off; otherwise, use a spoon to scoop out the flesh. Make baba ghanouj or something like it.)

Or stem the eggplant (you'd always do that, except when whole) and cut it into long planks, halves or rounds. (I never peel eggplant; the skin, on some varieties, is the best part.) Then salt it if you like (with firm, seedless, young, beautiful eggplant, that's not necessary). You can cook any of these any way you like, but I find thick planks take well to direct heat — that is, an uncovered grill, though not a blazing hot fire. Halves and rounds take well to indirect heat (the food is off the coals) on a covered grill.

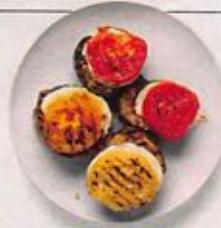
Similarly, most of these recipes will work

nicely no matter how you cut the eggplant, but I do love rounds layered with other things, like grilled tomatoes, mozzarella, cooked ground meat and onions. Halves are sturdy enough to "stuff" (you just shove flavorings into the scored flesh) with strongly flavored combinations. And planks just need to be brushed with the delicious mixture of your choice.

From now until the end of September, you're going to have the opportunity to celebrate eggplant season and grilling season at the same time. Do it.

COMMENT Your thoughts (and recipes) are welcome at nytimes.com/magazine. Follow Mark Bittman on Twitter: @bittman.

INDIRECT GRILL (ROUNDS)



ITALIAN STYLE

Cut eggplants into 1-inch-thick rounds; make shallow cuts on both faces and rub with a mixture of $\frac{1}{2}$ cup olive oil and 1 tablespoon minced garlic.

Grill, covered, until tender and lightly browned, turning and brushing with more oil as needed, about 20 minutes. Layer with grilled tomato and mozzarella. Garnish: Basil.



NORTH AFRICAN STYLE

Use just 3 tablespoons olive oil; add 2 tablespoons honey and 1 tablespoon ground cumin. Forget the mozzarella; layer with onion and/or tomato and if you like, cooked ground beef or lamb. Garnish: Parsley.



PARMESAN AND BREAD CRUMBS

Add red-pepper flakes to the olive oil and garlic. At the end of grilling, loosen eggplant from grate; top with bread crumbs and shaved Parmesan to melt. Tomatoes are nice, though optional. (Mozzarella is overkill.)

INDIRECT GRILL (HALVES)



WITH HERBS

Slice eggplants in half lengthwise; make shallow cuts on flesh side. Combine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup olive oil and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup each minced onion and parsley; brush all over eggplant, pushing into slits. Grill, covered and turning as needed, until flesh is soft and skin is crisp, 20-30 minutes. Garnish: Parsley.



JAPANESE STYLE

Brush with neutral oil. In a saucepan, heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup miso and 2 tablespoons each sugar, mirin and sake until sugar dissolves; add 1 tablespoon grated ginger.

Brush mixture over eggplant after it's halfway cooked. Garnish: Scallions.

MEDIUM HEAT DIRECT GRILL (PLANKS)



SIMPLE

Cut eggplants into planks $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch to $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thick. Combine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup olive oil and 1 teaspoon minced garlic; brush all over planks and place directly on the grill. Cook until dark brown on both sides, about 10 minutes total, turning as needed.



LEBANESE STYLE

Keep the olive oil and garlic. In the last few minutes of grilling, brush eggplant with a mixture of thick yogurt and fresh lemon juice. Garnish: Mint.



CHINESE STYLE

Instead of olive oil, use 1 tablespoon sesame oil with 4 tablespoons hoisin sauce, 1 teaspoon each rice-wine vinegar and soy sauce, a dash of chili powder and fresh minced ginger. Garnish: Cilantro.

HIGH HEAT DIRECT GRILL (WHOLE)



BABA GHANOUJ

Grill whole eggplants, turning occasionally, until blackened and collapsed, 20 to 30 minutes. Cool, peel and mash; combine with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup toasted pine nuts, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup tahini or yogurt, olive oil, lemon juice and minced garlic. Serve with pita.



WITH GROUND MEAT

Instead of pine nuts, add sautéed ground lamb, beef or chicken. Omit the tahini and lemon juice; add fresh parsley and chili powder.



BRUSCHETTA

Instead of pine nuts, add toasted whole garlic cloves and mash them with the eggplant. Omit the tahini and add 1 diced tomato. Spread onto slices of baguette. ♦