



By **Peggy Crum, MA, RD, Health4U Nutritionist**

Eggplants are delicious little sponges, ready to soak up the flavors in any dish. That's their strong suit.

Their downfall? Bitterness. Bitter taste is nature's way to stave off predators. Plant breeders have worked on reducing this off-putting taste by producing new varieties. Despite genetic upgrades, bitterness prevails when the fruits mature due to bitter alkaloids that concentrate in the seeds of the eggplant.

Many world cuisines embrace the bitter, even celebrate it. But if eggplant's bitter bite makes your mouth tingle (and you don't like that), these tips are for you!

- Use eggplants in season, July through October in Michigan.
- Shop for fresh eggplants with green stems and leaves that cling tightly to the top of the eggplant.
- Avoid large eggplants—those that weigh over 1 ½ pounds. Choose medium-size or small eggplants with smooth, shiny dark purple or creamy white skin.
- Store at room temperature and use within 2 days. If you haven't used them in 2 days, put in the fridge for up to 2 days more.
- Use this salting technique especially if your eggplant is super-size. Cut eggplant into slices or cubes. Sprinkle with salt, about ½ teaspoon per pound. Place in a colander and let stand for 30 to 45 minutes. Press between paper towels. Give a quick rinse and pat dry before using in your recipe. Removing some of the moisture gives eggplant a meaty texture.

All this to say: Give eggplant a chance. A little extra care in preparation and it might just surprise you.

Classic eggplant dishes include eggplant parmesan, moussaka, ratatouille, and this month's feature, baba ghanoush. You can also grill it, stir-fry it, stuff it, bake it, and bread it for deep-frying. Experiment a little. With eggplant, anything goes!

# RECIPE for health

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featured food:

## EGGPLANT

## Baba Ghanoush

By *Corporate Chef Kurt Kwiatkowski, Residential Dining Services*

Makes 3 cups

- 3# eggplant (usually about 3 medium-sized eggplant)
- 1/2 t. ground cumin
- 1 head garlic
- Juice of 2 lemons
- 2 T. olive oil
- 1/2 t. salt
- 1/3 c. tahini
- 1/8 t. cayenne pepper
- 3 T. chopped fresh parsley

Preheat oven to 450°F. Prick the outside of the eggplant with the tines of a fork, then coat with oil and place the whole eggplants on a baking sheet. Cut ¼ inch off the top of the garlic head, drizzle with 1 teaspoon oil, and wrap in aluminum foil. Place eggplant and garlic in hot oven for 20 to 30 minutes until eggplants are well-browned and completely shriveled, and the inside is very tender. The garlic is done when the cloves feel very soft.

Set aside to cool. Then cut eggplants in half lengthwise. Scrape out the flesh and place in the bowl of a food processor. Squeeze the garlic to remove 3 cloves. Refrigerate the remaining garlic for another use.

Add the tahini, cumin, 3 cloves roasted garlic, lemon juice, salt, and pepper to food processor bowl. Blend until smooth. Remove from food processor and then mix parsley by hand. Adjust seasoning with salt and additional lemon juice if needed.

Eggplant is delicious sautéed. But its porous nature really soaks up the oil. This method will compress the spongy air spaces and get rid of the extra moisture in it. Toss 1 pound of cut-up eggplant with ½ teaspoon salt. Spread it on paper towels and microwave on high for 10 minutes until the eggplant feels dry and looks slightly shriveled. Place it in a hot skillet with about a tablespoon of oil stirring occasionally until nicely brown all over.

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