

Vegan Baingan Bhartha (mashed eggplant)

Baingan Bhartha (mashed eggplant) pronounced bane-gun baar-tuh is generally associated with North Indian food. It is usually prepared by roasting a whole Baingain (eggplant) with skin and stem intact over an open fire or charcoal imparting a delicious smoky flavor. The eggplant is then cooled, skin is peeled off and stem cut off. The eggplant is then mashed and roasted with spices. It's vegan, gluten-free and absolutely delicious!



I avoided making this dish for many years because it seemed like a lot of work to roast an eggplant over a direct flame. Recently, I got an intense craving for this dish. So, I decided to take a chance and pop an eggplant in the oven. What do ya know!! It worked out perfectly. I'm sure roasting an eggplant over charcoal or over open flame tastes divine BUT I can tell you, roasting it in the oven tasted quite good too! I like that you can eat it as a traditional Indian dish or with a fusion Indian twist as bruschetta over Italian bread. Here's my recipe for Baingain Bhartha. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

Ingredients:

Eggplant: 1 medium(ish) to slightly large

Olive oil: 2-3 Tablespoons and a little extra to coat eggplant

Garlic: 2 cloves, minced

Ginger powder: ½ teaspoon

Jalapéno or long asian pepper: ½ thumb size, deseeded for medium spicy heat and diced. Add more or less to customize the heat.

Purple onion: 1 cup, finely diced

Tomatoes: 1 ½ cups

Anar Gourmet Food South Indian Curry Powder: 1 ½ teaspoon

Salt: 1 ½ teaspoon

Coriander (ground) : ½ teaspoon

Optional ingredients:

Lemon juice: 1-2 teaspoon, freshly squeezed (optional) for slightly tangy taste **OR** Tamarind juice

Tamarind powder/pulp/paste: (optional) to be used **instead** of lemon juice.

- If using powder: dilute ~2 teaspoons of tamarind powder in 1/8 cup water. Pour tamarind water into curry.

- If using pulp: dilute a small thumb nail sized pulp in 1/8 cup water, mash pulp with fingers to get concentrated juice. Use a strainer or catch seeds in hand when pouring juice into curry.
- If using paste: dilute ~2 teaspoon paste in 1/8 cup water and pour juice into curry.

Cilantro: ~ 1 Tablespoon for garnish (optional)

Recipe:

1. Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. Rinse the eggplant, pat dry with paper towel.
2. Rub olive oil over entire whole eggplant. Place eggplant in baking tray over aluminum foil (preferably parchment paper). Roast eggplant for ~45 mins -1 hour until a knife is easily inserted into eggplant without resistance.
3. Remove baking tray with eggplant from oven with oven mitts and let cool.
4. Once eggplant is cooled, peel off skin and chop off and discard stem.
5. Place eggplant in bowl and mash well with fork or potato masher until it is puréed, set aside. (You could also purée it in a blender for a smoother, less “stringy” texture).
6. Heat olive oil in quart pot on medium heat.
7. Add garlic, ginger and jalapeno. Saute for 1-2 minutes till garlic is light brown but not burnt.
8. Add onions, mix well with spices and sauté for ~ 5 mins, till softened but not fully brown.
9. Add tomatoes, mix well with onions and spices sauté for 5-7 mins until they are soft. Mash with spoon to further soften, if necessary.
10. Add mashed roasted eggplant, mix well.
11. Add curry powder, coriander powder and salt, mix well.
12. Turn heat down to medium low and simmer for ~5-7 mins.

Steps below are optional:

13. **Add tamarind juice if tangy taste is desired (optional)**, simmer for ~3- 5 mins. Stir to make sure eggplant is not burning or sticking to bottom of pot.
14. Turn stove off.
15. Transfer to serving bowl.
16. **Sprinkle lemon juice (optional) instead of tamarind juice if tangy taste is desired and NOT using tamarind juice. Mix well.**
17. Sprinkle on cilantro as garnish (optional)

Serve hot with naan, chapati/roti or for a *fusion Indian twist* serve with chips or Italian bread for an Indian style bruschetta.

Enjoy!!