

HOME *style*

ON THE MENU

Gretchen's table: Cheesy eggplant flatbreads taste like summer

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As locally grown produce fills Pittsburgh-area farmers markets, there's never been a better time to embrace seasonal eating.

One favorite summer option, thanks to its neutral flavor and a spongy texture that turns creamy when cooked, is eggplant. Technically a fruit, the dark purple globes and more slender Japanese variety can be fried, baked and/or grilled. It works just as well as a headliner in eggplant parm as it does in supporting roles — say, a stir-fry or curry or seasonal summer stew like ratatouille.

Eggplant provides both soluble and insoluble fiber, and one cup has only 20 calories. It's also rich in antioxidants that promote healthy aging and support your overall immune system.

CHEESY EGGPLANT FLATBREAD

Cook's note: Pick an eggplant that has a firm skin and gives a light spring when squeezed; if it's mushy, it's over-ripe. Also, the cap and stem should be green. Eggplants with wrinkled skin are dehydrated, and past peak freshness.

- 1 large eggplant, thinly sliced
- Sea salt
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella or mozzarella-Parmesan mix cheese, divided
- Oil, for drizzling
- 1 cup halved cherry tomatoes
- ½ small red onion, thinly sliced
- 1 or 2 garlic cloves, finely minced
- 2 tablespoons homemade or jarred basil pesto
- 1 ounce thinly sliced ham, such as jamón serrano
- Fresh basil leaves

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and pre-heat oven to 425 degrees.

Sprinkle eggplant slices liberally with salt, and allow to sit for 10-15 minutes on a cutting board or other prep surface to draw out the water. Pat dry with a paper towel.

To prepared pan, add a thin layer of shredded mozzarella. Lay the eggplant slices on top of cheese in rows, overlaying the edges slightly, to form a solid rectangle. (I used 12 slices of eggplant.)

Top with remaining shredded mozzarella, then bake for 20-25 minutes, or until the edges are golden and bubbling.

While eggplant is baking, drizzle a little oil in a saute pan and, when it sizzles, add cherry tomatoes, red onion and garlic. Cook, tossing occasionally, until tomatoes burst and onion softens, then set aside.

Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly, then lay another sheet of parchment paper on top, and flip the eggplant flatbread over onto a prep surface.

Spread basil pesto evenly on the cheese base, then layer with the tomato-onion mixture, leaving a 1-inch border around the toppings. Add the ham and basil leaves, then roll tightly from the bottom up, pressing gently to compact the ingredients. Use the edge of your parchment paper to help lift and tightly roll the flatbread from the bottom upward. (Press gently as you roll to keep the wrap compact and secure.)

Unwrap the roll, then slice it in half using a sharp knife and enjoy.

Makes 1 large wrap.

— Gretchen McKay, Post-Gazette



DESIGN RECIPES

SAY HELLO TO YELLOW

CATHY HOBBS

Tribune News Service

The color of the moment? Yellow.

Every season seems to have a color that captures the mood, and this summer that color is yellow. From soft buttery hues to rich golden tones, yellow is appearing in everything from furniture and textiles to art-work and accessories.

Long associated with the sun, energy and warmth, yellow can instantly brighten a space when used purposefully.

Looking for ways to incorporate yellow into your home décor? Here are some top tips.

START WITH A "POP OF COLOR"

If you're hesitant about using yellow, start small by beginning with accessories and accents such as toss pillows, vases or artwork.

CHOOSE MUTED SHADES

Soft buttery shades, ochre and even shades of gold tend to feel more sophisticated and timeless than bright, overly saturated yellows.

PAIR YELLOW WITH NATURAL MATERIALS

Wood, stone, linen and woven textures help ground yellow and create a balanced, organic look.

BRIGHTEN NEUTRAL SPACES

A room filled with whites, beiges and grays can benefit from touches of yellow that add warmth and energy.

YELLOW UPHOLSTERY

An accent chair, ottoman or bench can provide a cheerful focal point without dominating the room.

BALANCE WITH BLACK ACCENTS

The contrast between yellow and black feels modern, graphic and surprisingly sophisticated.

ROOMS THAT BENEFIT FROM WARMTH

Small spaces such as bathrooms, kitchens and even family rooms can be ideal spaces for incorporating this uplifting color.

AVOID OVERDOING IT

Yellow works best as an accent rather than the star of the show. A few thoughtfully placed elements will have greater impact than using yellow as an overall dominant color.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of CathyHobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."



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