



Bulgarian Guvetch

CONTRIBUTOR

Nechama Rivlin

TIME

2 hours

YIELD

8 servings



Photography: Dan Peretz, Styling: Nurit Kariv

Guvetch (meaning earthenware pot) is a casserole of vegetables and tomatoes that entered Israeli cuisine via Jewish immigrants from the Balkans. Like recipes for classic French ratatouille or Sicilian caponata, the vegetables in Nechama Rivlin's recipe are sauteed separately, yielding a richer and more nuanced flavor.

Salting the zucchini and eggplants before cooking — and the minimal liquid added to the dish before it's tucked into the oven — ensures the vegetables retain some bite and don't disintegrate.

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INGREDIENTS

1 eggplant (ideally baladi or heirloom), cut into 1-inch / 2-cm cubes

4 light green zucchini, cut into 1-inch / 2-cm cubes

Salt

4 tomatoes

1 large onion, diced

6 tablespoons olive oil

2 green peppers, deseeded and cut into cut into 1-inch / 2-cm cubes

2 red peppers, deseeded and cut into cut into 1-inch / 2-cm cubes

2 carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch / 2-cm cubes

2-3 celery stalks, cut into 1-inch / 2-cm pieces crosswise

3 handfuls of green string beans, edges trimmed and cut into 1-inch / 3-cm pieces crosswise

3 medium potatoes, cut into 1-inch / 2-cm cubes

For the sauce:

1 tablespoon tomato paste or Bulgarian pepper paste (Lutenitsa brand, available at Balkan specialty stores)

¼ cup tomato puree (ideally Mutti brand)

1 tablespoon sweet paprika

½ teaspoon hot paprika

Juice from ½ lemon

½ teaspoon sugar

½ tablespoon coarse salt

½ cup water

PREPARATION

1. Line two large trays with paper towels. Place the cubed zucchini in one layer onto one tray and the cubed eggplants in one layer onto the other tray. Sprinkle the zucchini pieces with 1 heaping teaspoon of salt and lightly toss the zucchini with your hands. Repeat with the eggplants. Set aside for 30 minutes (or up to 4 hours), ideally in a sunny and warm spot.
2. Using a sharp knife, score a “X,” on the bottom of each tomato. Place the tomatoes in a bowl and pour enough boiling water to completely cover the tomatoes. Soak the tomatoes for 1 minute, drain and wash the tomatoes with cold water. Peel the skins off of the tomatoes. Cut each tomato into 8 slices and discard the tomato seeds. Set aside.
3. Place the onions and 3 tablespoons of olive oil into the bottom of a wide Dutch oven over high heat and fry the onions for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Reduce the heat to medium and fry the onions for another 5 minutes or until the onion starts to get golden brown.
4. Increase the heat to medium high and add the green and red peppers, frying and stirring for 5-7 minutes until the peppers are lightly browned and starting to soften. Add a pinch of salt, stir and continue frying for 30 minutes. Transfer the sauteed vegetables into an extra wide bowl.
5. Add 1 tablespoon of olive oil into the Dutch oven, the carrots, celery and string beans and saute for 1 minute over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium and continue frying the vegetables for 8-9 minutes until the carrots, celery and string beans are lightly browned and softened. Transfer these vegetables into the wide bowl with the cooked peppers and onions.
6. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 340°F / 170°C. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat and add the cubed potatoes. Cook for about 10 minutes or until the potatoes are parboiled. Drain the potatoes and set aside.
7. Use a paper towel to pat the zucchini and eggplant pieces dry from all the moisture that seeped out from the salt. Place a skillet over medium heat and add 2 tablespoons of oil. Once the oil is sizzling, add the zucchini and eggplants. Fry the vegetables for about 8 minutes or until they are golden, stirring occasionally. Transfer the zucchini and eggplants off of the heat.
8. **Make the sauce:** While the eggplants and zucchini are frying, place all of the ingredients for the sauce into a small pot. Add ½ cup of water, stir well and bring the sauce to a boil over high heat. Remove the pot from the heat once the sauce comes to a boil and set aside.
9. Place all of the fried vegetables into the Dutch oven, making sure the string beans are on bottom of the pot (to prevent them from drying out). Gently stir the vegetables and add the

tomato slices and par boiled potatoes. Pour the sauce over the vegetables. Gently shake the pot to evenly distribute the sauce and if the sauce does not reach half the height of the vegetables in the pot add a bit of water or enough to cover the vegetables halfway.

10. Transfer the pot into the oven and roast the guvetch for 45 minutes until most of the sauce has reduced and the vegetables are slightly golden. The guvetch will store well in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

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