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Vegan Moussaka

Moussaka is a layered eggplant casserole that traditionally contains lamb or beef and a rich dairy-based sauce. Although Greece seems to be the birthplace of moussaka, many other regions of the world claim their own versions, including the Middle East, Ethiopia, and Eastern Europe. Our version uses broiled eggplant instead of fried and includes a creamy vegan sauce.

1 large eggplant	2 bay leaves
2 Tbs. olive oil plus additional for brushing eggplant	1 tsp. cinnamon
1 onion, chopped	1/8 tsp. ground allspice
2 cloves garlic, minced or pressed	1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 cup red wine	Freshly ground black pepper
1 Tbs. tomato paste	8 oz. vegan cream cheese (we used Tofutti's Better Than Cream Cheese)
1 15-oz. can crushed tomatoes	1/2 cup soy milk

1. Oil an 8 x 8 baking pan; set aside. Heat the broiler. Trim both ends of the eggplant and cut 1/4" lengthwise slices (peeling the eggplant is optional). Place slices on a baking sheet and brush with olive oil. Slide baking sheet under the broiler and bake until slices are nicely browned. Turn slices over, brush with olive oil, and brown the other sides. Remove from oven and set aside.

2. While browning eggplant, heat 2 Tbs. olive oil in a large saucepan. Cook onion and garlic until onion is translucent. Add next 8 ingredients (red wine through black pepper); stir to combine. Reduce heat to low; cover and simmer for 10 minutes.

3. In a small saucepan over low heat, combine vegan cream cheese with soy milk. Stir occasionally until cream cheese is melted.

4. Place half the eggplant in the baking dish. Spoon half the tomato sauce over the slices. Repeat with remaining slices and sauce. Spoon the cream cheese sauce over the casserole. Place baking dish in oven under broiler until top is nicely browned. Remove from oven and let sit for a few minutes. Serve with a green salad.

Variation: If you like to cook with meat substitutes, add a vegan beef or sausage to the tomato sauce mixture.