First course or a main meatless meal

Let's bridge Greece and Italy – or let's just use up things in my refrigerator that need using! This is fantastic and could be used as a great first course or a main meatless meal.

BUCATINI WITH EGGPLANT, FRESH TOMATOES, SPINACH AND FETA
Serves 4 as a main course or 6 as a first course

1/4 cup olive oil
5 large garlic cloves – peeled and thinly sliced on a mandoline
1 medium eggplant, cut in quarters lengthwise and then sliced 1/4" thick
1.5 lbs. fresh plum tomatoes – about 7, cored and cut into quarters lengthwise and then sliced into 1/4" slices
1/2 bunch or 4 oz. fresh tender spinach leaves, (or baby spinach) stems removed, washed and air-dried
2 oz. Greek feta cheese, cut in 1/4 cubes
1 lb. dried bucatini No 6 pasta or spaghetti or fettucini
Pecorino Romano cheese, freshly grated
Chiffonade of basil to garnish

Prepare the eggplant and salt layers of it in a mesh colander to draw out and drain the bitterness. Use fine sea salt. Let sit while you prepare everything else, the longer the better, but do this for at least 20 minutes.

Prepare the tomatoes and place in a separate large bowl and salt it as well with sea salt, toss with a spatula and let sit. This will intensify the tomato flavor.

Warm the olive oil and sauté the sliced garlic on very low heat for 10 – 15 minutes. Do not let it brown.

Start a large pot of salted water to boil for the pasta.

Cut cheese and slice the basil leaves.

Take paper towels and squeeze and dry the eggplant and add to the skillet with the garlic and olive oil. Raise heat to medium and sauté until the eggplant is fork

tender. When the skillet becomes dry, drain the tomatoes in the same mesh colander and add their juices to the skillet.

Cook the pasta al dente and drain, saving some pasta water, just in case you need a little moisture.

In a large bowl you used for the tomatoes, layer 1/3 pasta, 1/3 fresh tomatoes, 1/3 eggplant mixture, 1/3 spinach, feta cheese and grate some pecorino on each layer. Continue until all is used up, pour in any extra tomato juice and toss and combine. The heat from the pasta and eggplant will warm the tomatoes, wilt the spinach and melt the feta. Garnish with more pecorino and the chiffonade of basil.

I hope you LOVE it!

cut salted eggplant

chopped salted tomatoes

Finished dish before basil garnish