

Ratatouille with Penne

Ratatouille, the classic vegetable stew of Provence, is featured in all the small restaurants along its coast. Vegetables for ratatouille are usually prepared separately and not combined until the end. Here everything is cooked together. I don't bother to peel the eggplant, but do so if you wish. I recommend Japanese eggplants for this dish. Long and thin, they are firmer and have fewer seeds than regular eggplants.

Ratatouille is generally served on its own, at room temperature, sprinkled with the best-quality olive oil, olives, and parsley. I use it as a pasta sauce, tossing it with cooked penne before garnishing it with olive oil, olives, grated Parmesan cheese, and parsley or basil.

4 Servings

Ratatouille

- 1 long Japanese eggplant or small regular eggplant (about 10 ounces), cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 small firm zucchini (about 1/2 pound total), cut into 3/4-inch cubes
- 2 cubanelle or long Italian peppers (about 1/2 pound total), seeded and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 cups cubed (3/4-inch) onions
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped garlic
- 1 can (14.5 ounces) diced tomatoes in sauce
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 cup olive oil

Penne

- Salt
- 3/4 pound penne (I use small penne mezzanine)
- 3/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 cup small pitted oil-cured black olives
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for the table
- A few fresh basil or parsley leaves, for garnish

For the ratatouille: Put all the ingredients in a large saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Mix well, reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook gently for 30 minutes. If the mixture still has a lot of liquid, reduce it by boiling, uncovered, for 3 to 4 minutes. Cool to room temperature. You will have about 5 cups.

For the penne: Bring 3 quarts salted water to a boil in a large pot. Add the penne and stir it in well, so it doesn't stick together. Return to a boil, stirring occasionally, and cook for 10 to 12 minutes, or until it is cooked to your liking.

Meanwhile, combine the ratatouille, 3/4 teaspoon salt, pepper, and olive oil in a large glass bowl and microwave for a couple of minutes to warm it through. Drain the pasta and add it to the ratatouille in the bowl. Sprinkle on the olives and the cheese and mix well. Divide among four hot plates and garnish with the basil and grated cheese. Pass more at the table.

Note: To serve the ratatouille on its own, spoon it into a serving dish, drizzle on a little extra-virgin olive oil, sprinkle with 1/4 cup pitted oil-cured black olives or kalamata olives, and garnish with 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh basil or parsley.