

126: Imperial Aubergines

Charred Eggplant

Amarys Herndon, Palm & Pine

1 large Black Beauty eggplant, flesh pierced in 3 places

Kosher salt to taste

2 ounces fresh cheese (recipe follows)

1/3 cup tomato relish (recipe follows)

4 leaves basil, torn

6 leaves parsley

1/4 cup peanuts, toasted and crushed

6 slices ciabatta bread, grilled

Olive oil to taste

Char the whole eggplant on the grill. Piercing the flesh will keep steam pressure from building (which can cause a hot eggplant lava explosion) and allow extra char flavor into the eggplant. When the eggplant is well charred and deflated, carefully cut it open (it will be steamy!) and season the flesh with salt.

Top the eggplant with cheese, tomato relish, herbs and peanuts. Serve with grilled bread and drizzle the entire plate with good olive oil.

Serves 2 to 4.

Fresh Cheese

1 gallon whole milk

2 teaspoons kosher salt

5 ounces lemon juice

3 ounces vinegar

Combine the milk and salt in a heavy-bottomed saucepan and heat over medium to medium-low heat to 165 degrees. Stir in the lemon juice and vinegar and continue to cook until the milk reaches 185 degrees.

Let the milk sit for 45 minutes. The curds will completely separate from the whey. Spoon the curds into a colander lined with cheesecloth and let drain over a pan. Discard the whey.

When the cheese has finished draining, gather the cheesecloth, forming the cheese into a ball. Squeeze to remove as much moisture as possible. Remove the ball of cheese from the cheesecloth and wrap in plastic. Store in the refrigerator until ready to use. Fresh cheese will keep for up to week in the refrigerator.

Tomato Relish

- 1 1/2 quarts olive oil
- 3 quarts cherry tomatoes
- 1/4 cup dried lemon preserves
- 1/2 cup sherry vinegar
- 1/2 cup sliced shallots
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1 ounce minced garlic

Heat the olive oil until hot in a pan on top of the stove.

Combine the remaining ingredients in a deep, heat-proof container; a cylinder shape works the best for this recipe. Pour the hot oil over the tomatoes and other ingredients.

The relish will keep in the refrigerator for up to two weeks in a sealed container.