

# Caponata

Caponata is a Sicilian sweet and sour version of ratatouille. Because eggplant absorbs flavors like a sponge, it's particularly good in such a pungent dish. Like most eggplant dishes, this gets better overnight. It's meant to be served at room temperature, and I like it cold as well. It makes a great topping for bruschetta.

## Ingredients

1 ½ pounds eggplant (1 large), roasted  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 medium onion, chopped  
2 stalks celery, from the inner, tender stalks (the heart), diced  
3 large garlic cloves, minced  
2 red bell peppers, diced  
Salt to taste  
1 pound ripe tomatoes, preferably romas, peeled, seeded and finely chopped, or 1 14-ounce can crushed tomatoes (in puree)  
3 heaped tablespoons capers, rinsed and drained  
3 tablespoons coarsely chopped pitted green olives  
2 tablespoons plus a pinch of sugar  
3 tablespoons red or white wine vinegar or sherry vinegar (more to taste)  
Freshly ground pepper to taste

## Method

Peel the eggplant (leaving small strips of the peel on) and cut it into 1" cubes. Lay them on a large baking sheet and toss with 1 tablespoon olive oil. Roast in a 425 degree oven for 10 minutes. After 10 minutes remove from the oven and turn or stir the pieces. Back I. The oven for about 20 minutes more until the eggplant is tender and some of the pieces are caremelized. Cool slightly before proceeding with the recipe.

Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil over medium heat in a large, heavy nonstick skillet and add the onion and celery. Cook, stirring, until the onion softens, about 5 minutes, and add the garlic. Cook together for a minute, until the garlic begins to smell fragrant, and add the peppers and 1/2 teaspoon of salt. Cook, stirring, until just about tender, about 8 minutes. Add another tablespoon of oil and the eggplant, and stir together for another 5 minutes, until the vegetables are tender. The eggplant will fall apart, which is fine. Season to taste.

Add the tomatoes to the pan with about 1/2 teaspoon salt and a pinch of sugar. Cook, stirring and scraping the bottom of the pan often, for 5 to 10 minutes, until the tomatoes have cooked down somewhat and they smell fragrant. Add the capers, olives, remaining sugar, and vinegar. Turn the heat to medium-low and cook, stirring often, for 20 to 30 minutes, until the vegetables are thoroughly tender and the mixture is quite thick, sweet, and fragrant. Season to taste with salt and pepper and remove from the heat. Allow to cool to room temperature. If possible, cover and chill overnight. Serve at room temperature.

