

Burnt Eggplant Salad

Serves 4-6 | 20 minutes prep + 45 minutes cook time

If you think you don't like eggplant, try burning one. This ancient cooking technique evolved from dropping a whole eggplant onto the hot coals of fire, still a perfectly good method for roasting the mild-flavored nightshade. Cooked whole, the eggplant transforms into a soft, creamy mass that's perfect for things like baba ganoush, the tahini, garlic, and lemon spiked dip made all across the Levant.

Burnt eggplant is great for salads, too. Chopped finely and mixed with tomatoes, parsley, and, with a nod to the Lebanese version, cucumbers, the eggplant gives the dish a silky texture and picks up the flavors of the other ingredients. And while it's technically a salad, it's ok to scoop it up with pita bread just like a dip. It's best at room temperature.

1 medium globe eggplant

2-4 tomatoes, chopped

2-3 Persian style cukes

**½ bunch flat leaf parsley, leaves
and tender stems, chopped**

2 tablespoons za'atar

**3 tablespoons extra virgin
olive oil**

1 lemon, juice and zest

**1-2 teaspoons kosher-style
sea salt**

Step 1 Heat the oven to 450F. Cut a few slits in the eggplant to let steam escape and put the whole eggplant on a sheet pan or skillet (parchment paper underneath makes cleaning up easier, but isn't necessary). Cook for 45 minutes or longer, until the skin is dark, juices are bubbling out, and the eggplant has collapsed. Let cool, split lengthwise, and peel off the skin. Use a spoon or flat edge of a knife to scrape off the cooked flesh and chop. Discard the skin.

(You can do this on a wood or gas grill, too).

Step 2 Trim the stems from the cucumbers, place in a plastic bag, and smash with a rolling pin, kitchen mallet, empty wine bottle, or similar heavy object. Pour onto a cutting board and chop into bite-sized pieces.

Step 3 Combine the cooked eggplant, smashed cucumbers, tomatoes, parsley, lemon zest and juice, olive oil, and za'atar. Mix well, add 1 teaspoon salt, and taste. Add more salt if needed.