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## RATATOUILLE—Now's The Time for This Classic French Provençal Vegetable Stew!

Naturally Delicious Recipes • Janice Feuer-Haugen

I saw a portion of a travelogue the other evening on the Provençal region of southeastern France. The host was walking through a farmers' market in Nice. I was astonished and delighted to see rows of grab-and-go baskets filled with Ratatouille (*rat-ə-TOO-ee*) vegetables. Truly fast-food shopping at its healthiest.

Each basket looked rather similar to this handsome Ratatouille Family portrait featuring the vegetables in my Ratatouille.

For me, just the sight of farmers' markets and home gardens bursting with late summer produce turns my thoughts to Ratatouille. And, propels me into action.

### *Ratatouille and I Go Way Back*

Our relationship goes back to my college days in Berkeley. My new friend across the hall ate Ratatouille mixed with cottage cheese for lunch almost daily. At the time, it seemed much too weird for me to even consider trying it. Eggplant and peppers and summer squash—no way!

A few years later (and still in Berkeley), I discovered Julia Child and her masterpiece cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. For a number of years, her very complex Ratatouille recipe was my recipe, too. A bit obsessed at the time, I began judging cookbooks, not by their



Ratatouille Family Portrait

cover, but by their recipe for Ratatouille. I assumed that if the author didn't cook Ratatouille "our way," I wouldn't be able to trust their other recipes either.

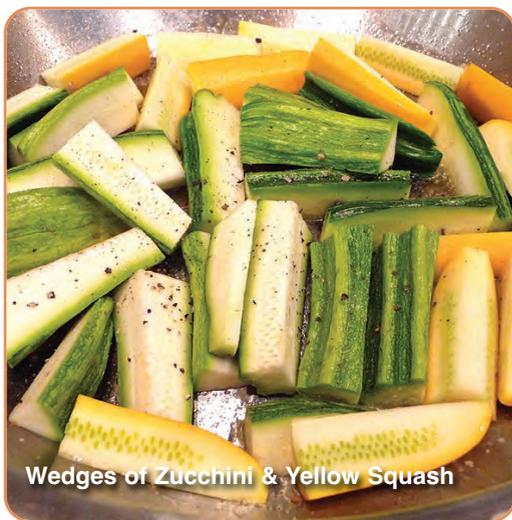
- Does the recipe include fresh basil?
- Are the vegetables large and chunky or evenly diced?
- Is each vegetable cooked individually?
- Do the vegetables remain identifiable or do they cook for so long as to become mushy?

### *Today's a New Day*

Over these many years, my attitude has become much less critical. Today's less complicated recipe still meets much of my earlier criteria. Plus, roasting the eggplant and peppers concentrates and intensifies their flavors. And, roasting eliminates all the oil typically required to sauté eggplant, making for an even healthier Ratatouille as well.

***Ratatouille. Cook it now!***

*Recipe on next page...*



Wedges of Zucchini & Yellow Squash



Ratatouille

## Ratatouille

### Provençal Vegetable Stew

Use more or less of both the vegetables and the herbs, depending on what's in your garden and/or what's ripe and flavorful at the Farmers' Market. Ratatouille travels well and tastes great at all temperatures. Serve it as a meal on its own or as a side vegetable. Go heartier by serving Ratatouille on a bed of creamy polenta, toasted quinoa, or your favorite pasta.

**Serves 4-6**

**Total time: 2 hours**

#### INGREDIENTS

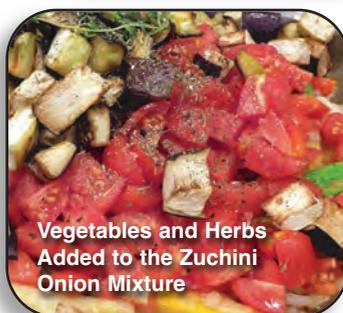
- ¾ pound red and/or yellow bell peppers, cored, seeded and flattened
- 1 ½ pounds eggplant, unpeeled, cut into 1-inch dice (6 cups)
- 1 pound ripe tomatoes, cored, cut into ¾-inch pieces (3 cups)
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 medium yellow onion, cut into ¼-inch dice (2 cups)
- 2 large garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 ½ pounds summer squash, both yellow and green, cut into 1 ½ inch by ½-inch wide wedges (5-6 cups)
- 1 teaspoon sea salt, divided
- Dozen twists freshly ground pepper



Roasted peppers



Roasted cubes of eggplant



Vegetables and Herbs Added to the Zucchini Onion Mixture

- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme or a few sprigs
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 teaspoon herbs de Provence, crumbled
- ¼ cup fresh basil, thinly sliced (*a chiffonade*)
- ¼ cup roughly chopped fresh parsley

#### INSTRUCTIONS

**1)** Heat the oven to 400° F. Place an oven rack on the oven's lowest level.

**2)** Core the peppers. Make a slice from the top to the bottom of each pepper. Make half inch slits along the top and bottom of each pepper. Remove any seeds and flatten each pepper. Place the flattened peppers on a very lightly oiled pan. Roast the peppers on the bottom oven rack

until tender, about 17 minutes. Turn the broiler onto high. Place the peppers about 6 inches from the heat. Broil 2 minutes. Rotate the pan 180° and broil another minute. Remove from the oven and cover the pan tightly with aluminum foil. After 10 minutes, remove and discard the blistered skin. Cut the peppers into approximately 2-inch by ½-inch wide strips and set aside.

**3)** Place the diced eggplant on a parchment paper-lined pan. Roast on the lowest oven rack until softened and starting to color, 15-20 minutes.

**4)** Heat 1 tablespoon of the olive oil in a large sauté pan or Dutch oven. Add the onion. Cover the pan and cook over medium heat until the onion is soft and translucent, about 5 minutes.

**5)** Stir in the sliced garlic and cook uncovered another 2-3 minutes until the onion begins to color. Transfer the onion and garlic to a small bowl and set aside.

**6)** Using the same pan, add the remaining tablespoon of olive oil and place over medium-high heat. Add the zucchini, sprinkle with ¼ teaspoon of salt and cook until tender and lightly browned.

**7)** Stir in the onion and garlic. Add the chopped tomatoes with their juices, sliced peppers, diced eggplant, thyme, rosemary, herbs de Provence, ¼ teaspoon of salt and freshly ground pepper. Gently combine the vegetables. Cover the pan. Simmer for 10 minutes, stirring twice. Uncover the pan and cook another 5 minutes.

**8)** Turn off the heat and stir in the fresh basil and parsley. Adjust the salt and pepper to taste.

**9)** Serve Ratatouille now or prepare it up to a day in advance. Serve it cold, at room temperature or gently re-heated. **Note:** Adjust the salt and pepper to taste before serving it cold or at room temperature. ■

### JANICE'S HEALTHY AGING YOGA CLASSES

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