

## EGGPLANT, TOMATO, BASIL, AND CHEESE TIMBALES

### *Timbales d'Aubergines, Tomates et Basilic*



This is the sort of dish I could eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And have. The thinly sliced, broiled eggplant takes on an almost sweet, candylike flavor, and how can one go wrong with the combination of eggplant, tomato, basil, and cheese? I've also made this dish substituting zucchini for the eggplant, with great success.

4 servings

**EQUIPMENT:** A baking sheet; parchment paper or a silicone mat; a pastry brush; four 1/2-cup ramekins; 4 warmed salad plates.

1 small, firm eggplant (about 8 ounces), stem end trimmed

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

Fine sea salt

12 Oven-Roasted Cherry Tomatoes (page 208)

24 large fresh basil leaves

8 ounces fresh goat's milk cheese

2 teaspoons Basil Oil (page 312) for garnish

1. Preheat the broiler. Place an oven rack about 3 inches below the heat. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone mat. Set aside.
2. Cut the eggplant lengthwise into 12 very thin slices. Brush both sides of the eggplant slices lightly with oil and sprinkle lightly with salt. Place the slices side by side on the baking sheet.
3. Place the baking sheet on the oven rack and broil until the eggplant is browned around the edges, about 2 minutes per side. Remove from the oven. (Do not turn off the broiler.)
4. Line each of four 1/2-cup ramekins with 3 slices of grilled eggplant, allowing the eggplant to drape over the edge. Place 3 tomatoes on top of the eggplant in the ramekins. Cover the tomatoes with 2 leaves of fresh basil. Place about 2 ounces of cheese on top of the basil, then add 2 more leaves of fresh basil, pressing down on the cheese to make a compact timbale. Fold the overhanging eggplant onto the preparation, pressing down once more. (The timbales can be prepared up to this point up to 4 hours in advance and kept at room temperature.)
5. Remove and discard the parchment paper or remove the silicone mat. Place the ramekins on the baking sheet, place on the oven rack, and broil just until warmed through, about 2 minute. Remove from

the oven. Turn the ramekins out, unmolding them onto 4 warmed salad plates. Garnish with 2 leaves of fresh basil. Drizzle with Basil Oil and serve.

✿c 120 calories per serving ✿ 9 g fat ✿ 4 g protein ✿ 6 g carbohydrates

**Origins:** In the seventeenth century, colorful purple eggplant tweaked the curiosity of King Louis XIV, who asked his gardener to cultivate the *béringere*, its Spanish name. But his gardener wrote, "We cultivate it purely out of curiosity," and in a seed catalog dating from 1760 it was sold as an ornamental plant. Due to its form, it was nicknamed "the laying hen" or "the vegetable egg" and was used to decorate desserts and fruit baskets. By 1800, it was being cultivated all over the south of France as an edible plant, and soon one could find it everywhere. In 1809, a French book called *The Good Gardener* mentions the eggplant's culinary use as a dessert, declaring, "It's a ragoût fantasy!" By 1825, eggplant had arrived in Parisian markets and begun to appear in cookbooks.