

Ask a Top Chef

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Times LIVE | 05 April, 2011 22:59



CULINARY MASTER: Harald Bresselschmidt, chef at the Aubergine in Gardens, Cape Town

Chef Harald Bresselschmidt's innovative culinary ideas have firmly cemented him as one of the country's leading chefs. Aubergine, his restaurant in Gardens, Cape Town, is a favourite of food critics.

He demonstrates aubergine "caviar" - a French recipe and a versatile method of serving his favourite vegetable.

"Too often, people choose the wrong aubergine and it is bitter. In this climate, the aubergine grows beautifully and cooked the right way, it is a wonderful dish," he says. The first tip is to buy the youngest aubergine, or brinjal, as possible. "The younger the vegetable, the heavier. The skin will be firm, shiny and smooth. Wrinkles indicate age. When you cut it, the seeds must be light in colour." If you buy a slightly aged brinjal, extract bitterness by salting it.

"Cut the aubergine it in half, lengthwise. Score it with a sharp knife, almost to the skin without cutting through, in criss-cross, diamond cuts.

Sprinkle the cuts generously with coarse salt.

"Leave them for 10 minutes and then wash the salt off under running water. The bitter juices will be removed."

He seasons the aubergine with lemon juice, finely chops rosemary which he sprinkles over the vegetable before drizzling with garlic oil.

"Garlic oil can be made before and stored. Use chopped, not crushed, garlic or it will be too strong. Then marinate for as long as possible."

Place the aubergine in an oven dish and cover with foil. Bake them in the oven for 45 minutes, at 160 C.

"They will be ready if soft when you poke them," Bresselschmidt says.

Scoop out the insides of the aubergine and mash the flesh to create the "caviar".

A delicious dip for fish is created by simply adding a spoonful of creme fraiche and a squeeze of lemon juice to the caviar. It also makes a rich vegetarian dip for nachos or crackers.

Add olives, anchovies and ratatouille vegetables to create a Mediterranean-style side dish for beef. To make a vinaigrette dressing for salads, thin the caviar with vegetable stock, avocado oil and mixed herbs.