

LUKAS VOLGER

Eggplant Orzo with Tomatoes & Pesto

This is peak summer comfort, a celebration of juicy abundance. Be sure to use as ripe and juicy a tomato as you can find, since its liquid loosens the orzo when it's stirred in at the end (and contributes heavenly, fresh tomato perfume). If you don't have access to great tomatoes, use cherry tomatoes and salt them for about 10 minutes before stirring in. Lastly, you don't necessarily need the extra oomph from bouillon paste (or using stock for the water), but the extra bit of backbone gives the dish a hard-to-pinpoint but very scrumptious quality. At my house, the leftovers disappear quickly and, mysteriously, overnight.

Serves 4

3 tablespoons butter or olive oil, divided

1 medium sized globe eggplant, 8 to 10 ounces, cut into ½-inch dice

1 teaspoon salt, divided

Big pinch red pepper flakes

3 cups plus 2 tablespoons water (or vegetable stock), divided

2 cloves garlic, finely grated or minced

1 cup orzo (7 ounces / 200 grams)

1 teaspoons vegetable bouillon paste, such as Better than Bouillon or [Born Simple Chicken-Style Broth](#) (optional)

1 large, juicy, and ripe tomato (8-10 ounces), diced

2 tablespoons ground parmesan, plus additional for serving

4 tablespoons pesto, for serving

Basil leaves for garnish (optional)

In a Dutch oven or a deep sauté pan, warm 2 tablespoons of the butter or oil over medium heat, then add the eggplant, ½ teaspoon salt, the pepper flakes, and 2 tablespoons water. Cover and cook, stirring often, until the eggplant is tender and quite reduced, which will take anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes; taste a few pieces as you go for doneness. Add remaining tablespoon butter or oil then stir in the garlic, toasting for a few minutes until soft and fragrant. Pour in the 3 cups water or stock and bouillon paste, if using. Bring to a simmer and stir in the orzo and remaining ½ teaspoon salt.

Cook uncovered, stirring often, until the orzo absorbs the water and is tender, 10 to 12 minutes. Once tender, add the tomato and parmesan, fold to combine, then cover and remove from the heat. Let stand for about 5 minutes.

Divide between serving 4 plates or shallow bowls, and top with a spoonful of pesto and a dusting of grated parmesan. Serve hot.