

## **Baked Orzo with Eggplant, Mozzarella and Oregano**

Adapted from Yotam Ottolenghi

7 Tablespoons olive oil  
1 large eggplant, cut into  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch dice (4 cups, or a bit more, if desired)  
At least 5 or 6 medium carrots, peeled and cut into  $\frac{2}{3}$ -inch dice (about  $2\frac{1}{8}$  cups)  
About 4 celery stalks, cut into  $\frac{2}{3}$ -inch dice (2 cups)  
1 large onion, finely diced (about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  cups)  
3 garlic cloves, crushed  
9 ounces orzo pasta (about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups)  
1 teaspoon tomato paste  
 $1\frac{2}{3}$  cups vegetable stock  
3 Tablespoon fresh oregano, chopped, or  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Tablespoons dried oregano, or  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Tablespoons thyme leaves  
Grated zest of 1 lemon  
4 ounces firm mozzarella, cut into  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch dice  
 $6\frac{1}{2}$  Tablespoons grated parmesan  
3 medium tomatoes, cut into slices almost  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick (about  $2\frac{1}{4}$  cups)  
1 teaspoon dried oregano  
Salt and pepper

Preheat heat oven to 400 degrees.

Heat the olive oil in a large saute pan over medium-high heat. Add the diced unpeeled eggplant and cook for 8 minutes, until sort of golden brown. Remove with a slotted spoon to paper towels and set aside. Add the carrots and celery to the pan and fry for 8 minutes. Transfer to paper towels. Turn down the heat to medium and add the onion and garlic. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring often. Add the orzo and tomato paste and cook for another 2 minutes.

Remove the pan from the heat and add the stock, fresh oregano and lemon zest. Add the cooked vegetables, mozzarella, parmesan, 1 teaspoon salt, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon pepper. Mix well and transfer to a rectangular 9x13 baking dish. Arrange the tomatoes on top, and sprinkle with the dried oregano,  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt, and a grind of black pepper.

Bake for 40 minutes, until all the liquid has been absorbed and the pasta is cooked through. Remove and leave to settle for a few minutes.