

**TOSSED RATA ‡**

Ratatouille Niçoise is a traditional stewed vegetable dish, originating, as its name informs us, in the Provençal region of France. The full name of the dish is rarely used and therefore most people don't know (or care) where it came from. Why it is named ratatouille is unrecorded, although *touiller* in French means "to toss" or perhaps "to stir." In French it is pronounced sort of like rah-tah-twee, but in English, more like rat-a-TOO-ey. Rather than fuss with the correct pronunciation, I decided to translate it into English, thus the title given it above.

Its usual makeup is eggplant, zucchini, onions, peppers, tomatoes, and garlic. There are many different variations, and today you can find ratatouille pies, soups, and quiches. It is common practice to cut the vegetables into rather small pieces, sauté them in oil, and then bake or simmer for a period of time.

My daughter, Kat, does not send me many recipes. Those that she does are ones that she deems to be really good, which you may verify by the examples appearing hither<sup>1</sup> and yon<sup>2</sup>) Upon trying this one, I have to concur that it is maybe the best I have eaten. Since almost all the ingredients that she listed already conformed with my dietary guidelines, I didn't have to change anything very much.

Her recipe makes use of the Crock-Pot<sup>®</sup>, an American brand going back to 1970, and further justifies the given appellation. The advantage of cooking ratatouille in a Crock-Pot is that the vegetables can be cut up in almost any manner desired, whereby the slow cooking of the Crock-Pot renders it still very tender and flavorful. But, if you feel the urge to be more traditional, you can cut the vegetables into the usual ½ -inch cubes.

**2 large onions, halved and sliced**

**1 large eggplant, sliced into 2" × ½" pieces**

**4 small zucchini, sliced**

**2 cloves garlic, minced**

**2 large green bell peppers, seeded and cut in thin strips**

**2 large tomatoes, cut in ½" wedges**

**1 1 (6-oz) can unsalted tomato paste**

**1 tsp dried basil**

**½ tsp powdered oregano**

**1 tsp "sugar"**

**½ tsp salt substitute**

**½ tsp (real) salt**

**½ tsp fresh black pepper**

**2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped**

**1 tbsp olive oil**

**½ tsp red pepper flakes**

**2 oz freshly grated Asiago cheese**

Layer half the vegetables in a large Crock-Pot in the following order: onion, eggplant, zucchini, garlic, green peppers, tomatoes. Sprinkle half the basil, oregano, "sugar", "salt", and pepper on the vegetables. Dot with half the tomato paste. Repeat the layering process with remaining vegetables, spices, and tomato paste. Drizzle with the olive oil.

Cover and cook on the low setting for 7 to 9 hours.

Place in serving bowl and sprinkle liberally with the grated Asiago cheese.

<sup>1</sup>Kat's Cauliflower Popcorn, page 53.

<sup>2</sup>Kat's Tandoori Style Chicken, page 130.