

Courtesy of Varuni Napoli

MAINS Varuni Napoli

Varuni Napoli's eggplant Parmesan

By Sarra Sedghi · Rough Draft Atlanta, 10/6/2026

Serves 2 | **Prep** about 20 minutes | **Cook** about 45 minutes | **Total** about 1 hour 5 minutes

Servings and times are Rough Draft estimates.

Ingredients

RAGU SAUCE

- [ ] 1/4 large yellow onion, peeled
- [ ] 2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- [ ] 1/2 can (2.5 kg) San Marzano tomatoes
- [ ] 4 1/2 Tbsp. Italian tomato paste
- [ ] 1 1/2 tsp. basil
- [ ] 1 1/s tsp .salt

EGGPLANT PARMESAN

- [ ] 1 small Italian eggplant
- [ ] 3 Tbsp. Pecorino Romano
- [ ] 1 1/2 cups of fresh mozzarella (1/2 cup for each layer)
- [ ] 2 Tbsp. salt

Directions

1. **Make the ragu:** Sauté the onion in extra virgin olive oil. While the onion is cooking, pass the tomatoes through a tomato grinder. When the extra virgin olive oil is hot, add the crushed tomatoes.
2. Add the tomato paste, salt and basil to the extra virgin olive oil. Let the tomatoes cook for 30 minutes on low heat while stirring occasionally. (Remove the onions after 15 minutes.)
3. **Prep the eggplant:** Clean the eggplant and remove the stem. Cut the eggplant vertically making each slice 1/8 inch thick.
4. **Fry the eggplant:** Fill a bowl with water and place the eggplant slices in the bowl with 2 tablespoons of salt. Make sure the slices are fully submerged. Let them soak for a few minutes. Take the slices out of the bowl and dry each slice completely. Fry the slices for two to three minutes. The slices should turn a light golden brown color.

- [ ] 1 cup ragu

5. **Assemble:** Preheat oven to 500°F. Spread 1/4 cup of ragu sauce on the bottom of the pan. For the first layer, use one full slice of eggplant. After, cut one full slice of eggplant in half and place on top of the first full slice of eggplant. Make sure to cross the first full slice with the half slices. Place another full slice on top. Cut another slice in half and layer on top. The first layer should have one full, two halves; one full, two halves. Cover each layer with ragu sauce, Pecorino Romano, and mozzarella. (There will be three layers of eggplant, each with ragu, Pecorino Romano, and mozzarella.)
6. **Bake:** Place the pan in the oven and cook for 10 minutes at 500°F. Remove from the oven, cover with ¼ cup of Ragu, some Pecorino Romano, and one basil leaf. Let cool and serve.

The story

This week, we're sharing Varuni Napoli's eggplant Parmesan recipe. The dish's origin is heavily debated, with historians noting that both Naples and Sicily claim stakes as eggplant Parmesan's birthplace.

"This recipe in Napoli has been passed down from generation to generation, and it's definitely a favorite of our guests. In Italy, we used to make a big tray of it to share with the family," Varuni Napoli co-founder Benedetto Varuni said.

Varuni adds that the key to this dish is ensuring the temperature doesn't get too high. "You don't want to burn the sauce [and] there shouldn't be any chunks of tomatoes. You want a smooth, non-watery consistency. The sauce should be a dark red, crimson color," he said.

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