

## to Faster, More Flavorful Ratatouille

ouille recipes call for cutting vegetables into pretreating them to remove moisture, and g them in batches on the stovetop. Our oven method eliminates the need for batch pretreatments—plus, it tastes better.

### LINE THE PREP

ions into chunks and smash the garlic id of mincing them. A brief stovetop sauté n oven time.

### OME VEGETABLES A HEAD START

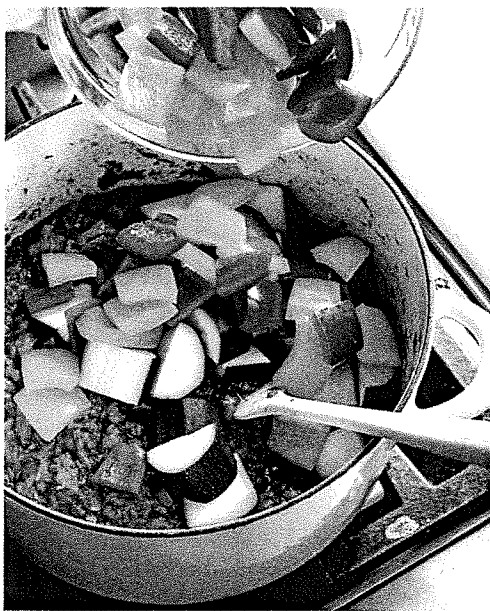
plant and tomatoes and then transfer the ven where moisture evaporates, flavors , and browning occurs.

### AN EGGPLANT MUSH

nt long enough and it becomes soft and exploit this trait by mashing the eggplant omatomes and onions) into a velvety sauce.

### WITH FRESHNESS

e pot toward the end of cooking, zucchini pers maintain freshness and bite.



## Better Browning in the Oven

ly dish like ratatouille, the vegetables can brown only when most of the moisture has evaporated. cause the exteriors of the vegetables must rise beyond the boiling point of water (212 degrees) to 0 degrees, the temperature at which browning occurs. On the stovetop, this can take a long time if must be kept low to avoid scorching. However, in the dry, ambient heat of the oven, evaporation equent browning happen quickly, especially since we sauté the onions and garlic in the pot on the first, preheating the pot before it goes into the oven. Another benefit of oven cookery is that as evaporates, a dark, flavorful fond develops around the inside edge of the pot. Such a fond would h longer to develop over the low flame of the stovetop.



ON THE STOVE

below the pot: less browning and less fond



IN THE OVEN

Heat around the pot: more browning and more fond

ome pleasing bite to contrast with the ce.

in the zucchini and bell peppers and e pot to the oven for 20 minutes. When t few pieces of zucchini were still on the g done, but rather than return the pot , I simply covered it and let it rest for 10 ow a paring knife just slipped in and out s.

l that the pot had a dark ring of fond inside edge. When left to sit with the lid m moistened the fond, so I could easily browned bits back into the ratatouille, a simple but robust flavor boost. For

spice and heady fragrance, I also added red pepper flakes, a bay leaf, and herbes de Provence (a French blend usually consisting of dried basil, fennel, lavender, marjoram, rosemary, savory, and thyme). In fact, the dish now tasted so rich that I felt that some freshening up was in order.

The intensely caramelized, almost jammy quality of the ratatouille needed a touch of acid. Although entirely untraditional, a splash of sherry vinegar helped wake up the flavors of the sweet vegetables. Finally, just before serving, I stirred in chopped fresh basil and parsley and gave the stew a glossy drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil. And there it was, a ratatouille that was simultaneously flavorful and easy to make.

## WALKAWAY RATATOUILLE

SERVES 6 TO 8

This dish is best prepared using ripe, in-season tomatoes. If good tomatoes are not available, substitute one 28-ounce can of whole peeled tomatoes that have been drained and chopped coarse. Ratatouille can be served as an accompaniment to meat or fish. It can also be served on its own with crusty bread, topped with an egg, or over pasta or rice. This dish can be served warm, at room temperature, or chilled.

- 1/3 cup plus 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 large onions, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 8 large garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
- Salt and pepper
- 1 1/2 teaspoons herbes de Provence
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 1/2 pounds eggplant, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 pounds plum tomatoes, peeled, cored, and chopped coarse
- 2 small zucchini, halved lengthwise and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 yellow bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon sherry vinegar

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Heat 1/3 cup oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add onions, garlic, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until onions are translucent and starting to soften, about 10 minutes. Add herbes de Provence, pepper flakes, and bay leaf and cook, stirring frequently, for 1 minute. Stir in eggplant and tomatoes. Sprinkle with 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and stir to combine. Transfer pot to oven and cook, uncovered, until vegetables are very tender and spotty brown, 40 to 45 minutes.

2. Remove pot from oven and, using potato masher or heavy wooden spoon, smash and stir eggplant mixture until broken down to sauce-like consistency. Stir in zucchini, bell peppers, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and return to oven. Cook, uncovered, until zucchini and bell peppers are just tender, 20 to 25 minutes.

3. Remove pot from oven, cover, and let stand until zucchini is translucent and easily pierced with tip of paring knife, 10 to 15 minutes. Using wooden spoon, scrape any browned bits from sides of pot and stir back into ratatouille. Discard bay leaf. Stir in 1 tablespoon basil, parsley, and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to large platter, drizzle with remaining 1 tablespoon oil, sprinkle with remaining 1 tablespoon basil, and serve.