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## IMAM BAYILDI WITH RICE PILAF

Serves 4 – 1h 45' + 20' resting – Easy - Takes some time – Vegetarian

*For the aubergines:*

4 small aubergines (250g each)\*  
4 onions  
4 garlic cloves  
8 tbsp olive oil  
2 cans chopped tomatoes (800g)  
salt + pepper  
½ tsp sugar  
3 tbsp flat leaf parsley, chopped

*For the rice pilaf:*

1 ½ tbsp olive oil  
15g butter  
3 tbsp orzo pasta  
300g long-grain rice  
750ml chicken or vegetable stock

1. Wash the aubergines and peel off a few long strips of skin with a vegetable peeler, leaving gaps in between so you get a zebra effect. Sprinkle some salt on the cut side of the aubergines, place into a colander and leave to drain for 20 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, peel and chop the onions and peel the garlic cloves.
3. After 20 minutes, rinse the aubergines under a running tap and pat dry.
4. Heat the olive oil in a frying pan and fry the aubergines from all sides until they start to turn brown, for about 8 minutes. If using large aubergines you may need to use 2 frying pans.
5. Remove the aubergines and put on a plate so they can cool a little.
6. Put the chopped onions into the frying pan with the leftover aubergine oil. Add half a teaspoon of salt and fry for 5 minutes until soft. Crush the garlic cloves and add to the onions, and fry for a further 2 minutes.
7. Preheat the oven to 160°C fan.
8. Make a slit along the length of each aubergine and pull apart the flesh so you get a little pocket. Stuff each pocket with a few tablespoons of the fried onion mix.

9. Reheat the remaining onions in the frying pan and add the chopped tomatoes, 100ml water, ½ teaspoon salt, some pepper, ½ teaspoon sugar and the chopped parsley. Bring to a boil, take off the heat and pour into a ceramic ovenproof dish.
10. Place the stuffed aubergines on top of the tomato sauce and bake in the preheated oven for one hour.
11. Prepare the rice pilaf 25 minutes before the aubergines are done:
12. Heat the olive oil and butter in a saucepan. Add the orzo pasta and fry until golden brown. This will take a couple of minutes.
13. Add the rice and stir so it's evenly coated in butter.
14. Add the stock and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, cover and simmer until all the liquid has been absorbed. This takes about 15 minutes. Don't be tempted to lift the lid while cooking and do not stir!
15. Once the liquid has been absorbed, take off the heat. Remove the lid, place a sheet of kitchen paper on the rim of the saucepan to cover and put the lid back on.
16. Leave to rest for 5 minutes before serving. The kitchen paper will absorb the excess moisture and will make the rice nice and fluffy.
17. Serve the aubergines straight from the oven with the warm rice on the side.

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