## **Eggplant Wraps Are An Easy And Meatless Meal**

BY SUSAN M. SELASKY © 2013 Detroit Free Press

What's ideal about the eggplant is that it has so many uses other than fried and drenched in a red sauce topped with cheese.

You can roast slices and use as an ingredient for a grilled veggie sandwich. You can slice it, and use it in casseroles or gratins. Or you can roast it and mash the softened flesh to make a dip.

In today's recipe, fried eggplant slices become malleable and are used to make a wrap with a stuffing of cheese, pine nuts, spinach and sun-dried tomatoes. The recipe is extra terrific because it's meatless.

Eggplant is a fruit, although it's thought of and used as a vegetable. It's a member of the nightshade family that includes tomatoes and potatoes.

The original recipe makes 16 wraps and recommends four per serving. This will depend on the size of your eggplant. If you use the large kind, often called globe eggplant, the wraps will be larger. Smaller and narrower eggplant will work for first course- or appetizer-sized portions.

I used a medium-large eggplant and found that two wraps as a main dish was plenty for a serving.

The two main caveats of eggplant are that they are like sponges, especially when frying, and soak up a lot of oil. Eggplant can also be bitter. When working with eggplant many recipes suggest salting the eggplant and weighting it before frying it. After salting, rinse the eggplant and pat dry before using. This step removes bitterness and excess moisture so the eggplant doesn't absorb much oil when fried.

To slice eggplant, use a serrated knife to easily cut through the sometimes tough skin.

This recipe also uses sundried tomatoes. If you've never had them, you're in for a treat.

Sun-dried tomatoes, are just that, tomatoes dried in the sun or dried by another means. Once dried, the tomatoes shrink immensely and become chewy. The flavor is sweet and intense. Sundried tomatoes are a pantry staple of mine. They add depth of flavor to many dishes including pasta dishes, salads and pizzas. You also can serve them as an appetizer with fresh mozzarella, goat cheese or feta cheese.

They are sold packed in oil (look for them in the ethnic aisle) or dry-packed (most often in the produce section). If you buy the dry-packed you will need to rehydrate them to soften.

Sun-dried tomatoes have an

running water, spin dry and then heat in a large skillet to wilt, using just the water that is clinging to the leaves and drain off the excess liquid.

To assemble wraps: Take one slice of the cooked eggplant and place a little of the wilted spinach on one half. Then place a few pieces of sun-dried tomato on top, sprinkle with a few toasted pine nuts, and top with a slice of cheddar. Fold the eggplant over to form the wrap and place on the baking sheet. Re-

and fresh black pepper. Bake for 15 minutes, until the cheese has melted and is bubbling. Serve immediately.

Adapted from "Food: Vegetarian Home Cooking" by Mary Mc-Cartney (Sterling Epicure, \$29.95).

Tested by Susan M. Selasky for the Free Press Test Kitchen. Analysis per 1 wrap.

95 calories (63 percent from fat), 7 grams fat (2 grams sat. fat), 5 grams carbohydrates, 4 grams protein, 162 mg sodium, 9



Fried eggplant slices can be made malleable and used to make a wrap with a stuffing of cheese, pine nuts,



intense flavor, so a little goes a long way. Today's dish calls for sun-dried tomatoes packed in oil. I used a 7-ounce jar of the Alessi brand.

## EGGPLANT WRAPS

Makes: 16 wraps / Preparation time: 25 minutes

Total time: 45 minutes This recipe can be easily halved. Mary McCartney writes that "these wraps work well as a dinner party dish — either as a starter or as a main course with side dishes, such as warm potato salad or sauteed leeks with courgettes (zucchini). You can assemble them beforehand and then bake them when your guests arrive, making your evening more relaxing."

Olive oil cooking spray

2 medium to large eggplant 1 to 1 1/2 tablespoons dried

mixed herbs 3 tablespoons sunflower oil or light olive oil

16 ounces baby spinach

16 sun-dried tomatoes marinated in olive oil, each cut in half or thirds

3 tablespoons pine nuts, lightly toasted

5 ounces sharp white cheddar cheese, (regular or reduced fat) cut into 16 slices

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Coat a sided baking sheet with olive oil spray or use a nonstick baking sheet.

Cut the woody top off each eggplant and discard. Slice each eggplant lengthwise into eight pieces (16 in all) about 1/4- to 1/3-inch thick.

In a small bowl mix together the herbs and oil. Heat a large frying pan over medium-high heat. Working in batches, lightly brush each slice of eggplant on one side with the oil mixture and place in the hot pan. Fry until golden brown on one side, about 3 minutes. Brush the top side lightly with oil and flip to fry that side, another 2-3 minutes. When all the slices are cooked, set them aside.

Wash the spinach well in cold

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