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Jonathan's Grilled Eggplant and Portobello Mushroom Salad with Fresh Mozzarella

My friend Jonathan Waxman, whom I worked for in the 1980's when he had his legendary restaurant JAMS, made this salad at our house in Durham. He has a knack for putting unexpected twists on the obvious. For instance, grilling vegetables was nothing new to me, but I never would have thought to chop them after they were grilled, as he did, and toss them together as they are in this salad.

What to Serve When – This salad is delicious served alongside a T-bone-for-Two (page 160) or any grilled fish or chicken.

Serves 4 to 6

1/4 cup olive oil
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
1 garlic clove, minced
15 basil leaves, cut into thin strips
1 medium eggplant (about 1-1/4 pounds), sliced into 1/2-inch thick rounds
3 Portobello mushrooms (about 3/4 pound), stems removed and caps wiped clean
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1/2 pound fresh mozzarella cheese, cut into 1/4-inch cubes

1. Prepare a red-hot fire in a charcoal or gas grill or heat a grill pan over medium high heat.
2. Stir the olive oil, vinegar, garlic, and half of the basil together in a small bowl.
3. Place the eggplant and mushrooms on a baking sheet with sides and brush both sides lightly with the vinaigrette. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Grill the eggplant for 3 to 4 minutes per side, depending on the heat of the fire or your pan, until it is tender and light golden brown. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool to room temperature.
5. Grill the mushrooms for 2 to 3 minutes per side, until they have shrunk and wilted slightly but are still firm.



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continued

6. Chop the eggplant and mushrooms into 1/2-inch pieces and place them in a large bowl. Add the mozzarella and the remaining basil, season with additional salt and pepper if desired, and toss gently just to mix. Serve at room temperature.

Think Outside the Recipe: Use smoked mozzarella or bocconcini, bite-size mozzarella balls, in place of the fresh mozzarella cubes or omit the mozzarella and crumble goat cheese over the salad.