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DONNA ERICKSON'S BEST BITES
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By Donna Erickson

PHOTO CREDIT: Donna Erickson



Prepare Mini Eggplant Pizzas the Italian Way

One of the joys of raising kids is making new friends with others who are also raising kids. When my three were preschoolers, I regularly met up with neighborhood moms at the bus stop in the morning or for ballgames at the park and story time at the library. As the kids grew, so did the friendships.

Six of us still make a point of getting together throughout the seasons to celebrate our birthdays. One recent gathering was particularly memorable. Instead of meeting at a restaurant, we donned aprons in one of our kitchens and huddled around the center island for a cooking lesson that was taught by my neighbor Cristina, an energetic mom from Italy.

"To an American eye, Italy might seem the same with pasta and pizza wherever you go," she began. "But for food lovers, it's a country waiting to be discovered! Each region has its unique flavors and cooking techniques. For example, the taste of a simple ricotta cheese can vary from place to place," she said.

As she shared her passion for Italian food, she emphasized that using fresh, seasonal ingredients is the key to tasty meals. This is when she showed us how to transform eggplant into a light side dish called Pizzette di melanzane, which is common in the Campania region that she's from. Like a pizza minus the crust, these mini eggplant pizzas are tasty and versatile!

Now that eggplants are plentiful in our markets, find Campania on a map, and have fun preparing this easy and authen-

tic Italian recipe with your kids!

MINI EGGPLANT PIZZAS (PIZZETTE DE MELANZANE)

Makes 8-10 mini pizzas

- 1 large eggplant, about 1 pound
- 3/4 cup tomato puree
- 4 cloves fresh garlic, chopped
- Salt to taste
- Dried oregano to taste
- 1 cup coarsely shredded mozzarella cheese, or a 4-ounce bag
- Parmigiano Reggiano (optional)

Here's the fun: Preheat the oven to 400 F. An adult should cut the eggplant into 1/2-inch-thick rounds. Arrange them on a lightly oiled baking sheet.

As if constructing mini pizzas, let kids spoon the tomato puree over each round. Scatter the garlic and oregano, sprinkle salt to taste, and top with mozzarella. Add Parmigiano Reggiano, if you wish.



Bake rounds in the oven for 25 minutes, or until mozzarella has melted completely and bubbles. Serve immediately as a light side dish with a summer pasta salad and other fresh vegetables.

As an alternative, Cristina suggests serving the mini pizzas cold in a sandwich.

Cook's Note: If your child's like her young daughter, omit the garlic until they develop a taste for it.

Donna Erickson creates relationships and community through food and fun. Find more to nourish and delight you at www.donnaerickson.com.

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