

Zaalouk with Crispy Halloumi

Serves 4

3 large aubergines
5 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
4 tomatoes, finely chopped
2 tablespoons tomato purée
2 teaspoons ground cumin
2 teaspoons paprika
½ teaspoon dried chilli flakes
1 bay leaf
A pinch of sugar
Juice of ¼ lemon
A handful of finely chopped coriander leaves
300g halloumi, cut into 0.5cm slices
Warm pitta, to serve (or try it with *batbout*, page 30)
Sea salt

Zaalouk is served at room temperature as a side dish. The aubergine is first cooked over a flame until charred and tender and then added to a thick tomato sauce and finished off with olive oil, lemon juice and chopped flat-leaf parsley. It's perfect for dunking, so get plenty of soft warm pitta lined up. To make this into more of a meal, I like to serve my *zaalouk* with pieces of crispy, pan-fried halloumi. Although it's not really Moroccan, the salty cheese works so well with the richness of the aubergines that it's a perfect pairing.

1. Prick the aubergines all over with a skewer. Carefully place each one over a medium gas flame and cook for 3–4 minutes each side, turning four times, or until tender. You should be able to poke a skewer into the charred skin and straight through the flesh when they are cooked. Remove from the heat and leave to cool. Once cool to the touch, remove and discard the burnt skin. Cut off the top and finely chop the flesh. Set aside.

2. Meanwhile, heat 3 tablespoons of the oil in a pan over a medium heat. Add the garlic and cook for 30 seconds until fragrant. Tip in the tomatoes, tomato purée, cumin, paprika, chilli flakes, bay leaf and sugar. Season with a good pinch of salt. Add 100ml of water, mix well and bring to the boil. Cover, reduce the heat to low and cook for 10–12 minutes, stirring occasionally, or until the tomatoes have broken down.

3. Transfer the aubergines to the tomato sauce. Mix well and check the seasoning. Cover and cook for a further 10–12 minutes, stirring occasionally, or until the sauce is lovely and thick. Add the lemon juice and coriander and mix together.

4. While the aubergines cook in the sauce, heat the remaining oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat. Carefully place the halloumi slices into the pan and cook for 1–2 minutes each side until golden and crispy.

5. To serve, spread the *zaalouk* in a serving dish and top with halloumi. Give a final drizzle of olive oil and serve immediately with pitta.

