

Sultan's Delight (Hünkar Beğendi)



I have heard two different stories surrounding the name of this dish, Hünkar Beğendi, which literally translates as "the Sultan liked it." The first one is that the dish was created for Sultan Murad IV (1612-1640) and obviously he liked it. Where the dish was created--in the palace kitchens or in the kitchen of a moderate house that Murad IV spent a night on his way back from a hunting trip--is not clear. The second rumor is that the same dish was served for Empress Eugenie, the wife of Napoleon III, in Sultan Abdülaziz's [Beylerbeyi Palace](#) in 1869, and she liked it so much that Abdülaziz promised her to ask his chef to give Eugenie's cook the recipe. And the rumor goes that Abdülaziz's chef was reluctant to share his recipe. I salute whoever shared the recipe later on.

Hünkar Beğendi is lamb stew served on a bed of creamy roasted eggplant puree. However, "beğendi," in time, started to be used for eggplant puree. Now you can also find 'chicken beğendi' or 'meatball beğendi.'



for the stew

- 1 lb stew lamb (preferably from leg)
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 green chilies or bell pepper, finely chopped
- 2 tomatoes, petite diced
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 2-3 tbsp butter
- salt and pepper
- 1/2 cup parsley, finely chopped
- 1-1 1/2 cup hot water

for the eggplant puree

- 2 lb eggplant
- 1/4 cup white flour
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1/2 cup grated Turkish hard mature cheese OR kashkaval cheese OR parmesan
- 1-1 1/2 cup milk
- juice of 1 lemon
- salt and pepper

- Heat butter in a pot and sautee the onions for a couple of minutes. Then add the meat. When browned on all sides, add green pepper. Stir for a couple of minutes.
- Add tomato paste and stir for another couple of minutes.
- Add tomatoes and cook for 5 minutes.
- At this point add the hot water and let simmer until meat is tender, approximately an hour. Add more water if need be.
- Meanwhile, wash and prick the eggplants with a fork on at least two sides.
- Place eggplants on gas burner or under broiler turning them frequently until eggplant is collapsed and skin is charred. You can also bake them until flesh is soft, but charred tastes better.
- Let cool and then peel eggplants and discard stems.
- Mash eggplant with the back of a fork in a bowl and mix with lemon juice.
- Heat butter in a pot. Add flour and stir constantly to make a roux on low heat.
- Warm the milk and add slowly. Whisk to make the mixture smooth. simmer for 4-5 minutes.
- Add eggplant puree and mix well.
- Add salt and black pepper, and cheese. Mix well. Simmer for another 2-3 minutes.
- Make a bed on a plate with eggplant puree and place meat on top of eggplant puree. Sprinkle with chopped parsley.