



## **Nasu Nanban** 茄子南蛮

Sour-and-Spicy Eggplants,  
Southern Barbarian Style

The word “*Nanban*” refers to the Portuguese, the “southern barbarians” who settled in the port of Nagasaki, Kyushu late in the 16th century. In addition to Christianity and trade, these early Portuguese visitors brought with them *escabeche*, a fried and pickled seafood delicacy popular in their homeland. The Japanese adapted it to their tastes, using a variety of small fish such as smelts (*wakasagi*) and baby horse mackerel (*mamé aji*). *Nanban-zuké*, food prepared in the southern barbarian style, remains popular today in Japan. A vegan version of the fish dish is made with eggplant and called *NASU NANBAN*.

Makes 4 portions

6-8 eggplants, each about 3 ounces  
Vegetable oil, for skillet-searing OR deep-frying

### Sauce/Marinade

2/3 cup **Kelp Alone Stock** (Kitchen Culture post, KOMBU POWER Nov 28, 2019)  
1/3 cup rice vinegar, preferably brown rice vinegar  
1 tablespoons light-colored soy sauce (*usukuchi shōyu*)  
1 tablespoons *mirin*  
1 teaspoon minced garlic  
1-2 scallions, trimmed and minced, about 3 tablespoons  
2 teaspoons grated ginger  
1 pod *tōgarashi* (dried red chili pepper), de-seeded and cut into thin rounds

### Garnish

2 tablespoons freshly snipped chives, or finely minced leeks

Assemble the sauce/marinade: Combine the Kelp Alone Stock, vinegar, light-colored soy sauce, and *mirin* in a ceramic or glass container that will be just large enough to allow the eggplants to lie submerged in the sauce/marinade. Add the garlic, scallions and ginger. Break the *tōgarashi* pod in half. Discard the seeds and pith if you wish to keep the eggplant just pleasantly spicy. If your tastes run toward the incendiary, keep the seeds and pith (the pith is where capsaicinoids, chemical compounds responsible for the tingling sensation of heat, are concentrated). With scissors, cut the pod into thin circles and stir them into the sauce/marinade.

Prepare the eggplants:



Rinse eggplants, pat them dry, and then trim away stems removing the "petals" (calyx). Cut each eggplant in half, lengthwise. With the cut surface to the board, make many fine, shallow, parallel, slits on the diagonal into the skin side of the eggplants.



Cook the eggplants: EITHER skillet-sear OR deep-fry.



To **SKILLET-SEAR** heat oil in a skillet just large enough to hold the eggplants in a single layer. To preserve the vibrant purple color of the eggplant, place them skin-side down in the skillet. Press on them lightly to flatten and insure that all the skin comes in contact with the skillet. After 1 minute, flip the pieces of eggplant over so that the skin side is up. Continue to sear for 2 more minutes. Transfer to the container with the sauce/marinade being sure the seared eggplant is submerged in the liquid.

To **DEEP-FRY** you will need at least 2 and 1/2 inches of oil in your pan. I find that a Chinese wok, narrow at the base and wider at the top, is the best pan for this. Heat the oil to medium-high.



Test with the tips of dry chopsticks (or a wooden spoon handle): hold just under the surface of oil. When big bubbles begin to form the oil is about ready, 350 F/180 C.

Carefully slide the eggplant pieces into the oil; be sure the skin side enters the oil first to preserve the eggplant's skin color. Fry for about 2 minutes, until the flesh side has turned golden. Drain on paper towels before transferring the container with the sauce/marinade being sure the seared eggplant is submerged in the liquid.



Cover the container snugly with clear plastic wrap. Pickle the eggplant for at least 3 hours at cool room temperature and up to 72 hours in the refrigerator. The extended pickling time will markedly sharpen the piquant taste.

A typical single serving is several halves. Lift the eggplant pieces from the pickling sauce and arrange stacked in a mound or jauntily leaning against each other. Just before serving, sprinkle the chives or leeks liberally over the eggplant.

