Plant-based Moussaka

This is a delicious, hearty recipe for vegan moussaka that layers tender eggplant and potatoes with a savory lentil-tomato sauce and a creamy, plant-based béchamel. Think of it as Mediterranean comfort food. Bon appétit!

Ingredients

For the Vegetables:

- 2 large eggplants, sliced into ½-inch rounds
- 2 large potatoes, peeled and sliced into ¼-inch rounds
- Salt (for sweating the eggplant)
- Olive oil spray or a brush of olive oil (optional)

For the Lentil-Tomato Sauce:

- 3 cups cooked or canned green or brown lentils (or 2 x 14 oz cans)
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 can (28 oz) diced tomatoes
- 4 tablespoons tomato paste
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- Salt and pepper, to taste

For the Vegan Béchamel Sauce:

- 2 cups unsweetened plant-based milk (cashew, oat, or soy work well)
- 3/4 cup raw cashews, soaked for 4 hours (or soaked in very hot water for 30 minutes), drained

- 2 tablespoons nutritional yeast (optional)
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1/4 teaspoon fresh ground nutmeg (optional)
- 1 tablespoon light or white miso
- 3 cloves garlic

Instructions

1. **Prepare the Vegetables:**
    - **Sweat the Eggplant:** Lay the eggplant slices on a baking rack or paper towels, sprinkle lightly with salt, and let them sit for about 20–30 minutes. This draws out bitterness and excess moisture. Pat dry.
    - **Pre-Bake:** Preheat your oven to 375° F (350 ° F for convection). Arrange the eggplant and potato slices on separate baking sheets lined with silicone mats or parchment paper. Lightly spray if you wish. Bake the eggplant for about 25 minutes and the potatoes for 35 minutes until they're tender but not falling apart.
2. **Make the Lentil-Tomato Sauce:**
    - In a large pan, dry sauté the chopped onion over medium heat until softened (about 5 minutes). Add a little water or broth, if needed.
    - Add the minced garlic and cook for an additional minute.
    - Stir in the cooked lentils, diced tomatoes, tomato paste, cinnamon, allspice, and oregano. Season with salt and pepper.
    - Cover and let it cook for about 15-20 minutes, or until the sauce has thickened. Adjust seasoning as needed.
3. **Prepare the Vegan Béchamel Sauce:**
    - Blend the nondairy milk, cashews, nutritional yeast, miso, nutmeg, and garlic until the sauce is smooth and creamy.
4. **Assemble the Moussaka:**
    - Lightly spray a 9x13-inch baking dish (or use a non-stick dish) if needed.

- **Layer 1:** Arrange a single layer of potato slices on the bottom.
- **Layer 2:** Place a layer of eggplant slices over the potatoes.
- **Layer 3:** Spread half of the lentil-tomato sauce evenly over the eggplant.
- **Layer 4:** Add another layer of eggplant slices and then the remaining lentil sauce.
- **Top Layer:** Pour the uncooked béchamel sauce evenly over the top. Add a sprinkle of freshly grated nutmeg, if desired.

5. **Bake and Serve:**
    - Preheat the oven to 375° F (350° F for convection). Bake for 40-45 minutes, until the top is set and lightly golden.
    - Let the moussaka cool for 10 minutes before slicing. This resting time helps the layers firm up.
    - Garnish with fresh herbs or mini peppers, if desired, and serve with a green salad or other green vegetable.

