



1 eggplant (about 1 pound),
peeled or not,
cut into 1-inch chunks

Sea salt or kosher salt

1 stalk celery, diced
(about 1/2 cup)

Extra-virgin olive oil

1 small onion, peeled, cut pole
to pole into slivers

1 small red bell pepper,
trimmed, cut into small squares

1/2 cup canned tomatoes,
crushed or roughly chopped,
including some of
their puree or juice

1/4 cup green Sicilian olives,
pitted or not

1 tablespoon salt-preserved
capers, soaked in water for a
few minutes and drained

2 teaspoons currants

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

1/2 teaspoon sugar, or to taste

Freshly ground black pepper
(optional)

1/2 cup unbleached
all-purpose flour

1 pound small to medium squid,
cleaned (see page 43)

Canola or other vegetable oil,
for frying

Lightly toasted slivered
almonds or pine nuts (optional)



Caponata and calamari: a weird-sounding combination, but one with tradition behind it, because caponata is sometimes garnished with fried seafood or mixed with small pieces of boiled octopus. The word for Sicily's classic eggplant dish probably evolved from *caupone*, a sailor's tavern known for hearty food, which may explain why some old recipes call for sea biscuits...and why seafood might enter the picture. In any case, you will be pleasantly surprised by the compatibility of this odd couple.

CAPONATA CON CALAMARI FRITTI **CAPUNATA CCHÈ CALAMARA** CAPONATA WITH FRIED CALAMARI

Sprinkle eggplant with 1 tablespoon salt and let stand 30 minutes; rinse and squeeze the eggplant to eliminate as much liquid as possible. (See also Notes on page 101.)

Bring 1 cup water to a boil in a small saucepan. Add celery. Reduce heat and simmer until celery is just tender, about 5 minutes; drain.

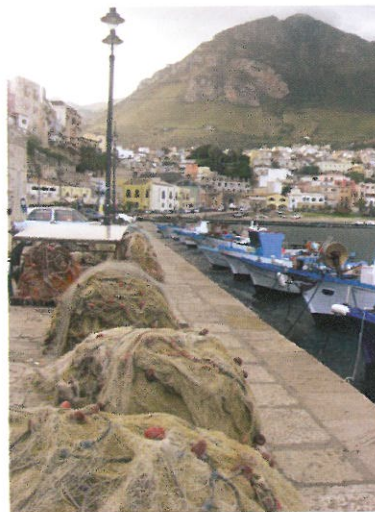
Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium heat in a medium skillet (preferably nonstick); cook onion and bell pepper until tender; remove to a bowl. Add 2 more tablespoons olive oil; fry the eggplant until lightly browned. Return the onion and pepper to the pan, and add the tomatoes and celery; simmer for several minutes, adding a little water if the mixture seems too dry. Add the olives, capers, and currants.

Combine the vinegar, sugar, and black pepper (if using) to taste in a small bowl; stir into the eggplant mixture (see Notes).

Combine the flour and 1 teaspoon salt in a shallow bowl. Slice the squid bodies crosswise into 1/2-inch rings. Blot the rings and tentacles with paper towels. Coat the squid well with the seasoned flour.

Fill a heavy skillet with vegetable oil to a depth of 1 inch. Heat over medium-high heat to 375°F (test with a small piece of squid to make sure it's sizzling hot). Add about half of the squid, making sure not to crowd the pieces.

(continued)



Fry until crisp and a light brown color, about 1 minute; remove with a skimmer or slotted spatula to drain on paper towels. Fry the remaining squid in the same way (see Notes).

Spoon the caponata into shallow soup bowls; sprinkle with toasted almonds (if using). Mound calamari in the center of each serving.

NOTES

- The calamari must be cooked at the last minute, but the caponata can be prepared and refrigerated up to 2 days in advance. It can be served warm or at room temperature.
- Beware: Because squid is so moist, the oil is likely to splatter. Hold your face well away from the pan and wear an oven mitt on your working hand.
- The color of the fried squid will be relatively pale, not the burnished gold you may expect in fried seafood. Frying the squid longer will deepen the color, but may also toughen them.

■ MAKES 4 SERVINGS ■ PREP 20 MINUTES (PLUS STANDING TIME FOR THE EGGPLANT)
■ COOK 20 MINUTES