



## Asian-Style Eggplant

SERVES 4 PEOPLE

TIME: 20 MINUTES

*This assertively flavored dish works best with meat.*

- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1½ teaspoons Asian sesame oil
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 medium scallions, sliced thin
- 3 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon vegetable or peanut oil
- 1 pound eggplant (1 medium or 2 small), peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
- 2 medium cloves garlic, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 2 teaspoons)
- 2 tablespoons chopped unsalted dry-roasted peanuts
- ½ lime, cut into wedges

1. Mix together the soy sauce, sesame oil, sugar, and scallions in a small bowl and set aside. Heat 3 tablespoons vegetable oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat until almost smoking. Add the eggplant and cook, stirring often, until soft and well browned, about 9 minutes (do not add any extra oil to the pan).

2. Clear the center of the pan and add the ginger, garlic, and remaining 1 teaspoon oil to the clearing. Mash the aromatics with the back of a spatula and cook until fragrant, about 15 seconds. Stir the aromatics into the eggplant. Remove the pan from the heat, add the soy mixture, and toss to coat. Transfer the eggplant to a serving platter, sprinkle with the peanuts, and serve immediately with lime wedges.

## GREEN BEANS

THE TRICK TO PREPARING TASTY GREEN beans is cooking them properly. Most recipes for green beans employ one of two cooking methods: (1) cooking, then flavoring, or (2) cooking and flavoring simultaneously (braising). The first method is faster than the second, so we decided to home in on it.

By this method, the green beans are either boiled or steamed, then sautéed or simply dressed with flavorful ingredients. Sounds simple—and it is—but we still had questions. Is boiling better than steaming? Should the beans be cut before cooking? Should salt be added to the water? How long should beans cook? Should they be refreshed in cold water to stop the cooking process?

After a number of experiments with boiling and steaming, we came to prefer boiling. Steaming takes twice as long as boiling, and when steaming a pound or more of beans, we found it necessary to turn them during cooking because those at the bottom were cooking faster than those at the top of the pile. Finally, boiling cooks each bean more evenly; steamed beans are often tender on the outside but raw-tasting in the middle. Just as important, boiling permits the addition of salt during cooking. The beans need more salt after they are drained, but its presence during cooking results in more even seasoning.

As for preparation, we preferred to trim the tops and tails with our fingers but leave the beans whole otherwise. Cutting the beans into shorter lengths exposes the tender flesh to too much heat. Because the skin cooks more slowly than the exposed flesh, the inside of the beans tends to become mushy. Boiling times varied greatly in the sources we consulted. One respected Italian cookbook author recommends cooking green beans for 20 to 25 minutes. Another suggests 1½ minutes. Are they writing about the same vegetable?

We found that the freshness and thickness