

Ajvar (Serbian Roasted Red Pepper Spread)

July 26th, 2025

Prep Time: 24:00

Cook Time: 02:00

This traditional Serbian Red Pepper spread is made by blending sweet ajvarski red peppers with oil. Since ajvarski peppers may not be readily available in your area, they can be replaced with red bell peppers (pimientos). Ajvar (pronounced as \AY-var\)

can be spread on a slice of bread, served as part of a charcuterie board, or used as the perfect condiment for Cevap Lepinje, filled with freshly grilled Cevapi. Regional differences to this recipe throughout the Balkans can include the addition of vinegar, tomatoes, aubergine (eggplant), hot peppers, and other flavor variations. This is my version of Ajvar Pepper Spread. For best results, refrigerate the finished spread overnight so that the flavors can meld together and mature.

Ingredients:

5 Ajvarski Peppers or Red Bell Peppers (about 2 pounds)

2 Jalapeño Peppers (optional)

1 Medium (12 ounces) Eggplant (Aubergine)

5 Cloves Garlic, minced

1 Teaspoon Table Salt, more or less to taste

Black Pepper, freshly ground to taste

1/4 Cup Olive Oil

1 Tablespoon White Wine Vinegar

1/2 Teaspoon Liquid Smoke

Additional Olive Oil, as needed

Directions:

Oven Roast

Preheat the oven to 350° F.

Wash the Peppers (including the optional Jalapeños) and the Eggplant (Aubergine).

As a reminder, wear rubber gloves when working with Jalapeño Peppers.

Cut all of the Peppers in half, lengthwise.

Discard the stems, seeds, and pith.

Use a knife to remove the stem and the calyx from the Eggplant.

Cut the Eggplant in half lengthwise.

Drizzle a little Olive Oil across the exposed flesh of the Eggplant.

Arrange the Peppers and Eggplant, cut sides up, on a large oven-safe sheetpan.

Roast for about 45 minutes to 1 hour, at 350° F.

The Eggplant should be completely tender.

Flip the Eggplant halves and all the Pepper halves so that the skin-side is up.

Set the oven to Broil.

Broil for a few minutes until the skins begin to char.

Move the Peppers and Eggplant into a large refrigerator dish and refrigerate overnight.

Blend

Remove the skins from the Eggplant and discard the skins.

Remove the skins from the Peppers and discard the skins.

Peel the Garlic Cloves.

Add the Eggplant, Peppers, and the Garlic, into a blender or food processor.

Pulse until blended.

Add the Salt and Pepper. Drizzle in the Olive Oil and pulse until fully integrated.

Reduce the Spread

Move the mixture to a large sauté pan.

Simmer on medium low heat, stirring occasionally for about 20 or 30 minutes.

Remove from the heat.

Add the White Wine Vinegar and the Liquid Smoke. Mix well.

Refrigerate in an airtight container up to 6 weeks.