



SENSATIONAL STUFFED VEGETABLES

• Text, photos and styling:
PASCALE PEREZ-RUBIN



There's no dish that's tastier or more enticing than stuffed vegetables swimming in a pot of spicy red or tangy yellow sauce. Stuffed vegetables can also be served on a platter of colorful vegetables.

Everyone has their favorite stuffed vegetables, which they recall from childhood. Some of us remember sitting at the kitchen table while our mothers or grandmothers spent time preparing various stuffed vegetable dishes. Each community has its own recipes, traditions and techniques, which make stuffed vegetable dishes so special and treasured.

In my vegetable garden, I grow a few different types of Swiss chard and marrow, and so I was excited to try them out in place of grape leaves with beef and vegetarian fillings. Below, I've included recipes for stuffed grape leaves, cabbage, marrow and Swiss chard. You'll be surprised to see how different the flavor is when you use the various leaves.

You can fill them with meat, rice and meat, rice with dried fruit, grains, quinoa and lentils, or any other vegetarian combination you can come up with. In addition, you can vary the sauces, which make stuffed vegetables one of the most treasured dishes you will ever serve your family and friends.

TIPascale

You can add dried fruit pieces (such as cranberries) or nuts (pine nuts or walnuts) to the filling to achieve deeper flavors. You can also season the sauce with basil or thyme.

TIPascale

for picky eaters

From my experience, many children like to dig through the vegetable coverings and eat only the meat inside. Consequently, I like to prepare meatballs with the same filling that cook slowly in the tasty sauce. That way, the children won't destroy the beautiful handmade stuffed vegetables you spent time carefully preparing.



STUFFED CABBAGE WITH RICE AND MEAT

Makes 25-30 rolls

1 medium cabbage / beet leaves / or mallow leaves

Filling:

4 Tbsp. oil
1 medium onion, peeled, rinsed and chopped finely
15 parsley sprigs, rinsed and chopped finely
400 gr. ground beef (preferably fatty, the kind used for meatballs)
¾ cup rice
2 Tbsp. oats
¾ tsp. black pepper
1 tsp. cumin
½ tsp. paprika
½ tsp. kebab spice or baharat
1 tsp. salt
½ tsp. cinnamon

Sauce:

3 Tbsp. olive oil
1 large onion, peeled, rinsed and chopped
3 cloves garlic, peeled, rinsed and crushed (optional)
2 tomatoes, rinsed and chopped into small cubes or crushed
3 Tbsp. tomato paste
1 tsp. salt
¼ tsp. black pepper
½ tsp. harissa or filfel chuma
1½ Tbsp. sweet paprika
4 cups water or soup stock (can be made using powder)
Juice from ½ lemon

There are a few different methods for softening leaves. The first method is to take a knife and cut out the core of the cabbage. Put the cabbage leaves in a pot of boiling water and blanch them for a few minutes, until they become limp and separate from each other. The second method is to put the head of cabbage in the freezer overnight. Then, after you defrost it, the leaves will be limp. The third method is to wrap the cabbage in plastic wrap and cook it in the microwave for 10 minutes. Use a sharp knife to cut out the core and then separate the leaves.

To prepare the filling, fry the onions until they turn golden brown. Transfer the onion to a bowl and add the rest of the filling ingredients. Mix well.

Flatten a piece of cabbage on the work surface. Place a spoonful of filling on the cabbage and fold over both sides, then roll it up. Prepare the rest of the cabbage rolls in the same fashion. If you have any leftover filling, you can make meatballs to be cooked in the same sauce.

To prepare the sauce, heat the oil in a large, shallow pot. Fry the onion until it turns golden brown. Add the garlic, tomatoes, tomato paste, spices and lemon juice. While stirring, add the water. Cover and bring to a boil.

Arrange the stuffed cabbage rolls so that they are packed in one on top of another (the sauce should cover up to 1 cm. above the rolls). Cover the pot and bring to a boil. Lower the flame and cook for 40-50 minutes, until the sauce thickens. Serve hot.



BASAL MAHSI (STUFFED ONIONS)

Makes 25-30 stuffed onions

3 elongated medium onions

3 Tbsp. oil

2/3 cup round rice, rinsed and cooked

3 Tbsp. ground beef

¼ level tsp. black pepper

¼ level tsp. baharat

¼ tsp. chicken soup powder

¼ tsp. salt

2 Tbsp. roasted pine nuts

Sauce:

4 Tbsp. silan

3 Tbsp. pomegranate sauce

4 Tbsp. lemon juice

1 tsp. salt

½ tsp. black pepper

½ tsp. chicken soup powder

1½ cups water

2 Tbsp. oil

Toppings:

5 dried apricots, cut into strips

5 pitted prunes, cut into strips

Peel the onions. Using a small knife, cut off inedible parts of top layer and cut halfway through the onions.

Boil water and blanch the onions for 7 minutes until all the layers begin to separate. Drain the onions and let them cool down. After they have cooled down, separate into layers.

To prepare the filling, heat the oil in a pot. Add the rice and stir. While stirring, add the meat and spices. Mix well. If needed, you can add a spoonful or two of water. Turn off the flame. Add the pine nuts and mix well.

Add ½ teaspoon of filling to each onion layer and roll up. Place the onion rolls in a pan with the opening face down. Sprinkle apricot and prune pieces on top and all the other onion pieces you didn't end up using.

Stir the sauce and then pour on top of the onion rolls. Drizzle with oil and cover with foil. Bake in an oven that has been preheated to 150° for 1 hour. Remove the foil and bake another 25 minutes until the sauce thickens.



GRAPE LEAVES WITH BROWN RICE

Makes 30 rolls

1 cup Persian rice or brown rice, rinsed well

¼ cup parsley, chopped

5 cilantro leaves, chopped finely

¼ cup nana, chopped

¼ cup roasted pine nuts

2 Tbsp. lemon juice

1 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar

1 Tbsp. silan or pomegranate sauce

2 Tbsp. olive oil

Salt and pepper, to taste

30 grape leaves in salt water, plus a few more (or marrow leaves) to line the pot

2 tomatoes, sliced

½ lemon, sliced

Boiling water to cover stuffed grape leaves

2 Tbsp. lemon juice

2 Tbsp. olive oil

Place the rinsed rice in a large bowl and add the other ingredients. Mix well.

Rinse the grape leaves and place one on your work surface, with the smooth side facing down.

Place a spoonful of filling on the side nearest to you. Then, fold in both sides and roll up leaf. Prepare all of the stuffed grape leaves in the same fashion.

Line the pot with a number of grape leaves and then arrange the tomato and lemon slices in the pot. Next, add all of the stuffed grape leaves so that they're all squished in together. Pour boiling water over stuffed grape leaves to cover them, then add lemon juice and oil.

Place a plate on top of the stuffed leaves (this is important so that the stuffed leaves are held in place as they cook). Cover the pot and cook over low flame for 40 minutes until rice filling softens.

Translated by Hannah Hochner.

**CLARIFICATION**

The Aniseed Cookies recipe ("Cookies and herbal tea for you and me," February 15) should have called for 2 packets of baking powder rather than baking soda.