

Dolmas (Stuffed Grape Leaves)

by Scott Troyer

This is the recipe I developed for my first attempt at making dolmas. I wanted to balance the salty savoriness of the grape leaves with a sweeter filling of meat, nuts, fruit and spices. Venison is not a typical choice for dolmas, but it was readily available and ended up working very well. Because venison is a very lean meat, there is no need to drain the burger. Lamb, beef, or bison would make good substitutes, but the lamb and beef would probably need to be drained.

Ingredients

50 grape leaves - canned in brine
1 C brown rice - short grain
2 C water
1 T butter
1 lb. venison burger - Lamb, beef or bison can be substituted.
1/4 C dates - pitted and diced
1/4 C olives - kalamata variety, pitted and diced
1/4 C nuts - almonds, macadamia, pistachio, sesame mixture - crushed
1 T garlic - crushed
1 C red onion - diced
2 T chives - fresh or dried
2 t nutmeg - ground
2 t cinnamon - ground
1 t turmeric - ground
1 t ginger - ground
1 t coriander - ground
1 t cumin - ground
2 T olive oil
1/2 lemon - juiced
1 C feta cheese

Instructions

Place rice, water and butter in a covered sauce pan over high heat. Boil under tender. Set aside.

Combine burger, nuts, dates, olives, garlic, onion, chives, nutmeg, cinnamon, turmeric, ginger, coriander, cumin and olive oil in a skillet. Brown over medium high heat until the pink is gone from the burger. Add rice to burger mixture.

In the center of a stemless grape leaf place approximately 2 to 3 tablespoons of burger mixture. Fold the bottom of the leaf up, the top of the leaf down, the right side over to the left, and then roll tightly to the left. Place the rolled leaf in a non-greased pan. Repeat the filling and rolling process until either out of meat or grape leaves.

Cover pan with foil and bake for approximately 30 minutes at 400 degrees. Baking longer makes for a more tender grape leaf, while a shorter time gives the leaf more of a chewy bite.

To finish, sprinkle lemon juice over the dolmas and top with crumbled feta. Serve warm with hummus and veggies, tabbouleh and pita bread. Makes approximately 50 dolmas.