

Stuffed Vegetables with Meat

Traditional Turkish stuffed vegetables (dolma) filled with savory meat and rice mixture. Learn to make this authentic Mediterranean dish with expert tips.

20 min

PREP

40 min

COOK

1h

TOTAL

4

SERVINGS

Medium

DIFFICULTY

Stuffed Vegetables with Meat

Ingredients

- 1.1 lb ground beef
- 1 cup rice
- 1 onion
- 3 clove garlic
- 2 tsp tomato paste
- 2 tsp pepper paste
- 1 tsp cumin
- 2 tsp black pepper
- 2 tsp salt
- 0.5 cup olive oil
- 1 tomato
- 2.2 lb bell pepper

Instructions

- 1 Prepare the vegetables**

Cut the tops off the bell peppers and save them. Remove all seeds and white membranes from inside the peppers, keeping the walls intact. If using other vegetables like zucchini or eggplant, hollow them out with a spoon, leaving 1/4-inch thick walls.
- 2 Make the filling**

Combine 1.1 lb ground meat, 1 cup rice, finely diced onion, 3 minced garlic cloves, 2 tsp tomato paste, 1 tsp salt, 2 tsp pepper, and 2 tsp cumin in a large bowl. Mix thoroughly with your hands until the mixture holds together when squeezed, about 2-3 minutes.
- 3 Stuff the vegetables**

Fill each hollowed vegetable with the meat mixture, pressing gently but not packing tightly, leaving 1/4-inch space at the top for rice expansion. Replace the pepper tops if using peppers.
- 4 Arrange for cooking**

Place the stuffed vegetables upright in a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven or large pot, arranging them snugly so they support each other. Slice the tomato into thick rounds and place one slice on top of each vegetable.

5 Prepare cooking liquid

Whisk together 1/2 cup warm water, remaining tomato paste, and a pinch of salt in a small bowl until smooth. Pour this mixture around the vegetables in the pot, not over them.

6 Cook the stuffed vegetables

Bring the liquid to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce heat to low and cover. Simmer for 35-40 minutes until the vegetables are tender when pierced with a knife and the rice is fully cooked. Check occasionally and add more hot water if the liquid evaporates completely.

Tips

Choose bell peppers that can stand upright on their own - this helps them cook evenly and prevents the filling from spilling out during the cooking process.

Partially cook the rice before mixing it with the meat filling to ensure both components finish cooking at the same time without overcooking the vegetables.

Place a heavy plate or lid directly on top of the stuffed vegetables while cooking to prevent them from floating and to ensure even cooking throughout.

Don't overfill the vegetables - leave about 1/4 inch of space at the top to allow the rice to expand as it cooks and absorbs the flavorful cooking liquid.

Test the cooking liquid seasoning before adding it to the pan - it should taste slightly more seasoned than you want the final dish, as it will dilute as the vegetables release their juices.

If your vegetables are browning too quickly, reduce the heat and add a bit more liquid to create more steam and gentler cooking conditions.

Save any leftover filling to make quick stuffed tomatoes or to use as a filling for grape leaves or cabbage rolls for your next meal.

Let the finished dish rest for 10-15 minutes before serving to allow the flavors to settle and the cooking liquid to be absorbed properly.