

Dolma with grape leaves

- 1 lb minced mutton or beef, or a mixture of the two (you may add lamb fat pieces as well)
- 1 onion, chopped
- ½ cup round rice (risotto rice)
- ½ cup cilantro, finely chopped
- ½ cup dill, finely chopped
- ½ cup mint, finely chopped (fresh or dry)
- 1 tsp salt (you may add lemon salt per taste)
- ¼ tsp black pepper, to taste
- about 80 small or 40 large grape leaves (split in two) – “Orlando” brand is the best
- 3 tablespoons butter or olive oil
- ¼ cup water



Preparation:

1. To make the filling, mix the meat with the onion, rice, cilantro, dill, mint, salt and pepper.
2. To wrap dolma: Hold a leaf (or half, if cut) shiny side down on the palm of your hand. Place about 1 teaspoon of the filling at the stem end of the leaf. Fold the top down, then the sides over the filling and roll up tightly to shape it into a 1-inch round bundle.
3. Arrange the stuffed leaves, side down, on the bottom of the pan. Continue until all the leaves and filling are used, arranging the stuffed bundles snugly together in the pan, making several layers.
4. Add butter on the top (add also one slice of lemon for flavor) and pour in ¼ cup of water (even less if you want). Place a small lid or a small ovenproof plate on top of the stuffed leaves to keep them tight and to prevent them from opening. Cook it in medium-low heat and simmer for about 1 hour 30 minutes, or until the leaves are tender, the filling is cooked, and there is little liquid left (if the liquid is completely absorbed at some point during cooking, add more water and continue to simmer).

Serve with garlicky yogurt sauce:

- 1 cup or more plain yogurt (if yogurt is too thick, add a bit of water)
- 2-4 cloves garlic - crushed with a garlic press or chop into small dices
- salt to taste

Don't forget to enjoy it with bread!

Notes:

- If using canned leaves, put batches of them in a strainer, rinse well under cold water to remove the salt, and drain. If the canned leaves feel too thick, blanch them in boiling water for about a minute, then drain. Otherwise, do not blanch. Cut off the stems.

- If using fresh grape leaves, boil slightly salted water in a medium saucepan and blanch the leaves in small batches (about 10 at a time) in the boiling water for about a minute (less if the leaves are very tender). This will soften the leaves and make them easier to roll and faster to cook. Remove the leaves from the pan using a slotted spoon and drain in a strainer. Cut off the stems.

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