

**05/27/10 - Yaprakes Yalangi, Stuffed Grape Leaves**

Some years ago, I planted a grape vine along the side of one wall in my back yard. Even though my yard is nothing more than a glorified patio, since I live in the city, my grape vine is flourishing this year. This spring it is full of young tender green leaves just the right size for Yaprakes and just in time to make them for my



Stuffed vine leaves are one of my favorite finger foods. They go by various names such as Yaprak, Yalangi, Dolma, or Dolmades. The earthy green of vine leaves with lemony rice is a winning combination. On my recent trip to Turkey, I ate vine leaves at almost every lunch and dinner. Served cold they are a great addition to an appetizer buffet.

Some recipes call for meat and rice filling which turns the Yaprak into a whole meal. I prefer just rice in the filling. Rice can be so versatile. You might prefer to combine the rice with wild rice, dried fruits, pine nuts, or make it all brown rice.

60 young fresh grape vine leaves or



1 large jar of grape vine leaves in brine

Filling:

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 onion, diced finely

¼ cup fresh mint, chopped

1/2 cup fresh parsley, chopped

1/2 cup fresh cilantro, chopped

2 cups long grain rice, or long grain and wild rice mix

1 teaspoon salt

Fresh ground pepper

2 cups water

¼ cup dried currants or ½ cup Sultana raisins

½ cup pine nuts toasted, optional

1 tablespoon fresh lemon zest

Cooking Liquid:

2 cups water

1/4 cup fresh lemon juice

3 tablespoons olive oil

Bring a large pan of water to boil, Salt the water, and blanch the fresh vine leaves in the water for 1-2 minutes. Carefully remove the leaves from the water, taking care not to tear them and drain them for a bit, as they cool off. Alternatively, if you are using leaves preserved in brine from a jar, carefully remove the leaves from the jar and boil them for 1 minute in unsalted water to remove the brine taste and refresh the jarred leaves. Drain the leaves.



To make the filling, heat the oil in a heavy saucepan over medium heat, add the onion and sauté until translucent. Season the onion well with salt and pepper. Next, add the mint, parsley, and cilantro, stir and then add the rice. Stir for a

moment and pour in the water. Bring the rice to a boil then reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer until the water is absorbed and the rice is tender. This amount of water will only cook the rice part way through. The rice will finish cooking after the vine leaves are stuffed. Remove the rice from heat. Add in lemon zest, toasted pine nuts, and dried fruit or raisins. Let the rice cool off.

Cover the bottom of a heavy skillet or Dutch oven with about 5 grape leaves, pressing about 1 inch up sides of skillet. Arrange 1 leaf, vein side up, on the work surface. Place 1-2 rounded tablespoons of rice filling near stem. Fold in sides, and



Arrange stuffed leaves, seam side down, close together in leaf-lined pan. I make layers in concentric circles. Combine the remaining 2 cups of water with lemon juice and olive oil. Pour this lemon liquid over the layers of grape leaves and cover the whole thing with 5 more unstuffed leaves. Place a lid on the pan. You can cook these on low heat on the top of the stove after bringing them to a boil and then reducing the heat, or you can bake them in the oven for around 1 and ½ hours at 350°. Cool completely.



Arrange stuffed grape leaves on a platter. Garnish with lemon slices and more fresh parsley.

Yaprakes keep refrigerated for several days or I have frozen them with success.

The two cups of rice yielded about 50 Yaprakes. The rice blend I used today seemed to have colored lentils or dried peas in it. Be creative, you could add dried apricots to the rice or other chopped herbs.

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