

GUASTELLO'S VILLAGE MARKET

Greek Stuffed Tomatoes (Gemista)

Serves 6

Ingredients

½ cup long grain rice
Extra virgin olive oil (I used Private Reserve Greek olive oil)
1 large red onion halved, mince ½ of the onion and slice the other
4 garlic cloves, minced
½ lb lean ground beef (you can use ground lamb or turkey)
Kosher salt and black pepper
1 tsp ground cumin
¾ tsp dried oregano
½ tsp allspice
½ tsp ground nutmeg
2 cups canned crushed tomatoes
½ cup white wine
¼ cup water
1 cup chopped fresh parsley
½ cup chopped fresh spearmint
6 large tomatoes

Instructions:

Rinse the rice well, place in a bowl and cover with water. Soak for 15 to 20 minutes until you are easily able to break one grain of rice between your fingertips. Drain.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. And begin working on the stuffing mixture.

Place a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add ½ cup extra virgin olive oil and heat until just shimmering but not smoking. Add chopped onions (but not the sliced onions) and garlic, toss briefly until fragrant (do not brown the onions and garlic.) Add the ground meat, season with salt, pepper, cumin, oregano, allspice and nutmeg. Cook the meat for about 5 minutes or until fully browned and cooked through (use a wooden spoon to break the meat apart to avoid large chunks.)

When meat is fully browned, add drained rice it to the meat mixture in the skillet. Add crushed tomatoes, white wine, and water (a pinch of salt if you like.) Bring the saucy mixture to a boil, turn the heat down and let simmer for for just 10 minutes or so (the simmering is an optional step, but it is helpful to get the rice cooking a little bit.) When ready, stir in the fresh herbs. Season with kosher salt to taste.

Meanwhile, prepare tomatoes for stuffing. Cut tomato tops (about ½ inch from top). Set the tops aside (they will be used later). Take a small pairing knife and carefully go around the edges of the tomato to

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loosen/separate the flesh. Then using a spoon, carefully scoop out the tomato flesh. Chop the flesh into large pieces and set it aside of later use (see photo in the tutorial above).

Prepare a 9 x 13 baking pan (this is the one I used). Oil the bottom of the baking pan with extra virgin olive oil. Spread chopped tomato flesh and sliced onion the bottom of the baking dish and add the chopped tomato flesh and sliced onion to make a bed for the stuffed tomatoes.

Now, spoon the saucy meat and rice mixture into the empty tomato shells. Arrange the stuffed tomatoes in the prepared baking dish. Cover the stuffed tomatoes with the reserved tops. From one of the corners of your baking dish, carefully pour about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of water. Add a little pinch of salt and a generous drizzle of extra virgin olive oil on top.

Cover the baking dish with foil and bake in heated oven for about 30 to 45 minutes, then uncover and cook for another 45 minutes to 1 hour or so (a total of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours or until the rice is fully cooked. The tomatoes will collapse well and become super tender.) Be sure to check during baking and add a little water if needed.

Credit: themediterraneanandish.com