

Turkish style stuffed greens

In Turkey all kinds of things get stuffed with delicious rice – aubergines, tomatoes, peppers, cabbage leaves, vine leaves and more. ‘Dolma’ are stuffed things and ‘sarma’ are rolled or wrapped things, so strictly these parcels are sarma. They work really well with spring or summer greens, which arrive in my weekly veg box.

Versions of sarma are also found in Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Poland and elsewhere – sometimes with meaty fillings. This combination of rice, pine nuts, currants and warm spices is typical of western Turkey – around Istanbul and down the Aegean coast, where the Romans established pine tree plantations millennia ago to feed their pine nut addiction.

The trick is to partially cook the rice before filling the leaves – cooked enough so they won’t burst their wrappers in the cooking pot, but uncooked enough to expand a little to form tight parcels. Sarma might be fiddly to make, but when you taste the results of your labour, you’ll realise why they spread so far.



Makes: 20-30 ‘sarma’

3 heads of spring or summer greens, leaves separated

5 tbsps (75ml) olive oil + extra

2 medium-large onions, finely diced

4 tbsps (30g) pine nuts

150g long grain rice

½ tsp salt

4 tbsps (30g) currants, soaked in warm water for 20 mins to plump up and then drained

½ tsp sugar

½ tsp powdered cinnamon

2 allspice berries and 2 cloves, ground together to a powder

2 tbsp minced parsley

2 tbsp minced dill

1 lemon, finely sliced + more to serve

1. Blanch leaves in a wide pan of salted boiling water for a few minutes, until supple. Carefully lift out and refresh in a bowl of cold water, then transfer to a tea towel to dry flat. Take care not to tear leaves.
2. Cook onions and pine nuts in oil over a low-medium flame until translucent, c.10 mins, stirring often.
3. Add rice, and continue to cook for a few more minutes, stirring. Turn heat to low, add salt and 100ml water, stir once, cover and cook for 5-10 mins until water is absorbed and rice is half-cooked.
4. Add currants, sugar, spices and herbs. Mix and taste to check for seasoning.
5. Lay any torn, unattractive or tiny spring green leaves in the bottom of a saucepan. Add several slices of lemon and a lug of olive oil.

6. Take one spring green leaf at a time and stuff with the rice mixture: If large, cut out tough central vein, dividing leaf in two lengthways. (Most leaves should be large enough to halve like this.) Place on a tablespoon of rice mixture, towards the bottom, and roll up, tucking in sides as you go. Place seam side down in the prepared saucepan. Pack in rolls snugly.
7. Finish with another layer of lemon slices and lug of olive oil. Pour in water until rolls are barely covered, weight down with a small plate, cover and simmer gently for approx 1 hour.
8. Leave in saucepan to cool, then carefully remove rolls to a plate to serve. Best enjoyed at room temperature with a squeeze of lemon and dollop of yoghurt.

