



Rice Stuffed Vine Leaves with Tzatziki (Dolmades)

I enjoy rolling the filling into vine leaves, once you get started it's quite meditative. Vine leaves come in large packs, which is just as well, as some will be too small or too large and some will tear. It's worth making a big batch, so consider doubling the recipe and freezing the excess. They can be steamed from frozen and are a real crowd pleaser. They're great served hot or cold with a glass of Greek ouzo or Turkish raki.

Makes about 35 pieces

METHOD

1. Heat oil in a saucepan.
2. Add onion and a good pinch of salt and cook for 10 minutes or so, until just starting to colour.
3. Add pine nuts and allspice, cook for a further minute then stir in rice, coating it well in the oil.
4. Stir in water, bring to the boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer on lowest heat for 15 minutes. Remove from heat and, if still slightly wet, set aside covered.
5. Rinse vine leaves well and lay out as flat as possible, smooth side down, on clean tea towels. If the stems are attached, snip them off.
6. Stir dill through the rice.
7. One by one, place a heaped teaspoon of rice mixture in the centre of each leaf and roll firmly, tucking in the ends to secure (*see below left*). Squeeze gently in the palm of your hand and place on a plate, seam side down.
8. When all leaves are wrapped, brush with oil and pack into a steamer basket, seam side down.
9. Place over simmering water and cook for 15 minutes.
10. Meanwhile, make Tzatziki: halve cucumber, use a teaspoon to scrape out the seeds then coarsely grate the rest onto a clean tea towel. Squeeze to remove excess moisture and combine with garlic, yoghurt and salt.
11. Pile vine leaf parcels onto a platter, brush with oil and serve with Tzatziki and lemon wedges on the side.

INGREDIENTS

- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing
- 1 red onion, finely chopped
- Salt flakes, to taste
- ¼ cup pine nuts
- 1 teaspoon ground allspice
- ½ cup long grain rice
- 1½ cups water
- 1½ tablespoons finely chopped dill
- 200g preserved vine leaves (about 50 leaves)
- 1 lemon, cut into wedges

Tzatziki

- 1 small Lebanese cucumber, peeled
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 200g thick natural yoghurt
- Salt flakes, to taste

Everyone has their own technique for rolling, I fold the piece of leaf closest to me over the rice and gently pull the leaf-covered rice back towards me to give it a cylindrical shape, then fold in the sides and roll away from me, tucking in the sides as I go to form a neat roll.