

Stuffed Grape Leaves

620 grams (approx. 21 ounces) jarred grape leaves
1 1/2 cups rice (I used jasmine)
1 kilo (2.2 pounds) ground beef
1/2-1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2-1 teaspoon allspice
1/2-1 teaspoon cumin
pinch black pepper
1 peeled chopped onion sautéed in 2 tablespoons oil till light brown
2 peeled crushed cloves garlic plus a few peeled whole cloves garlic
2 tablespoons chopped parsley
2-4 tablespoons lemon juice
3-4 tablespoons olive oil

Directions:

Start by draining your grape leaves and carefully removing from the jar. Unroll them and place in a bowl and cover with cool water, swishing them around a bit and let them sit for about 20 minutes. Now take your rice and place in another bowl and cover with boiling water a few inches above the rice and let soak for 20 minutes. Drain the rice well. Drain the grape leaves well. Prepare your pot by taking a pot that leaves room for expansion of the stuffed leaves, and using some of the less perfect leaves, line the bottom of the pot to prevent the stuffed leaves from scorching. Now in the bowl with the drained rice (you will see it expands somewhat from the soaking) add the ground beef, cinnamon, allspice, cumin, pepper, sauteed onion, crushed garlic and chopped parsley. Mix very thoroughly together. Now try to make an assembly line of the grape leaves and the meat mixture to ease the prep and with the bottom of the leaf facing you put a tablespoon of filling in a large leaf and a teaspoon of filling in small ones since the rice will still expand. Roll from the bottom to cover, turn in the sides of the leaf and roll closed tightly. Gently (!!)

squeeze a bit to make sure they don't unroll. Place the finished leaves in lines throwing in the whole garlic cloves here and there in the the lined pot making sure there's enough room for expansion. Sprinkle the olive oil and lemon juice over all. Cover with an upside down plate (yup right on the stuffed leaves) to hold them down so they don't unroll. Fill with water to just cover leaves.

Very gently bring to a simmer (not a boil, don't want them to burst) and cover the pot with a lid and cook for about 40 minutes, peek at them to check the water level, add a bit more if it's dissipated and continue cooking till they are tender about 15- 20 minutes more. Turn off the fire under the pot and let rest about 30 minutes. Serve hot or cold.