



Howard Hillman's Great Peasant Dishes of the world

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Yalanci Dolma

Turkey

It originated as a peasant dish. Today, it is a popular national specialty.

Pronunciation:

yuh-lahn'-jeh dohl'-mah

Part 1 Recipe

■ Ingredients

Appetizer servings: 8 to 12

■ Vine leaves

3 dozen

■ Olive oil

6 centiliters or 1/4 cup

■ Chopped white onions

15 centiliters or 2/3 cup

■ Long grain white rice

25 centiliters or 1 cup

■ Pine nuts

8 centiliters or 1/3 cup

■ Chopped raisins

30 milliliters or 2 tablespoons

■ Crumbled dried mint

15 milliliters or 1 tablespoon

■ Ground dried oregano

2 milliliters or 1/2 teaspoon

■ Salt (or to taste)

2 milliliters or 1/2 teaspoon

■ Cinnamon

1 milliliter or 1/4 teaspoon

■ Ground black pepper

1 milliliter or 1/4 teaspoon

■ Lemon juice

6 centiliters or 1/4 cup

■ Boiling water

35 centiliters or 1 1/2 cups

■ Steps

1 Prepare the vine leaves (see instructions below).

2 Heat the olive oil in a large sauté pan or skillet over low heat. Sauté the onions for 2 minutes, stirring frequently.

3 Add the rice. Stir the mixture frequently for 3 minutes.

4 Add the pine nuts, raisins, mint, oregano, and salt. Stir the mixture for 2 minutes. Then turn off the heat and wait several minutes before stirring in the cinnamon and pepper.

5 Construct the dolma, one by one, forming 2 by 5 centiliters (2/3 by 2 inch). First, lay a leaf on the work surface, dull side up and with the stem end facing you. Place a rounded tablespoon of the rice mixture in the center of the leaf. Fashion this mixture into a horizontal (left to right) rectangular mound. Fold the stem end over the rice mixture. Next, fold over the sides of the leaf. Finish making the cylinder by rolling the package away from you. Expect to make about twenty dolma.

6 Line the bottom of a large, thick, wide, and flat-bottomed sauté (or other shallow, straight-sided) pan with a single layer of the unused vine leaves.

7 Place the dolma seam side down in the pan in neat, semitight rows.

8 Pour the lemon juice evenly over the dolma. Next, pour the 35 centiliters or 1 1/2 cups of

freshly boiled water over the dolma.

9 Weight the dolma down with a heavy, heat-proof, flat plate that just fits into the pan. This helps prevent the dolma from losing their symmetrical shape as they cook.

10 Bring the preparation to a simmer over low to moderate heat. Cover the pan and gently simmer the dolma for 35 to 40 minutes, or until the rice has absorbed most of the liquid.

11 Turn off the heat, remove the lid and plate, and let the preparation come to room temperature. The rice should absorb the excess liquid as it cools. If not, drain off the remaining liquid.

13 Serve chilled or at room temperature. In the former case, refrigerate the dolma for at least 1 hour. If you transfer the dolma from the pan to a serving platter, be careful not to rip the leaves.

Part 2 Cooking tips

■ Vine leaf prepping

● **Stems** - Cut off the fibrous stems (if any) with a knife or scissors. Be careful not to rip the leaves.

● **If fresh** - Thoroughly wash them in warm tap water. Soften these leaves by placing them a few at a time in a large pot of boiling water. As each leaf is

parboiled for 2 to 3 minutes, drain it and place it on a flat surface, shiny side down. Keep the leaves separated.

- **If brined** - This would be the case if the leaves are sold in glass jars or out of a barrel. Gently rinse off as much of their excess salt as possible in two or more changes of hot tap water.

■ Additional pointers

- **Fresh vine leaves** - When using them, select young and tender specimens.
- **Brined vine leaves** - If you use them, reduce the salt quantity in the recipe by half (no matter how well you rinse these leaves, some salt will remain).
- **Selection** - Usually forty or more vine leaves are packed in a standard-sized jar. Select the choicest (untorn) leaves for stuffing and save the rejects for lining the pan.
- **Spices** - If you add the cinnamon or pepper in step 4 before the pan has slightly cooled, those spices may scorch and therefore become bitter.
- **Rolling** - In step 5, each dolma should be rolled in a reasonably tight but not taut bundle. You need to leave some room for the expansion of the rice as it cooks.
- **Positioning** - Unless the dolma are packed snugly and seam side down, the rice may ooze out as it expands.
- **Extra leaves** - If you have more dolma than can fit into a single layer in the pan, start a second layer. Fill up empty spaces with surplus vine leaves.
- **Simmer** - In step 10, the water must simmer but not boil. The lid must not be removed until near the end of the cooking period or some of the needed steam will escape.
- **Rice** - Do not overcook the preparation in step 109. Otherwise the rice will become mushy.

■ Serving suggestions

- **Eating** – Forget utensils. Use your fingers.
- **Lemon** - Furnish each guest with a lemon wedge for squeezing over the dolma.
- **Appetizer/salad** - Dolma can be enjoyed as an appetizer or as part of a salad plate.
- **Party dish** - Since yalanci dolma can be made a day ahead of time, it is a convenient party dish.

■ Variations

- **Oven** - Dolma can be prepared in the oven.
- **Flavoring agents** - Experiment with other seasonings, such as garlic.
- **Nuts** - Eliminate the pine nuts and/or raisins from the recipe.
- **Broth** - Substitute broth or tomato juice for the water in step 10.
- **Lamb** - Dolma can be made with the addition of ground lamb. In this case the dolma are served hot, usually with a sauce.
- **Plumpness** - Some chefs completely cook the rice before they stuff the vine leaves. The chief drawback to this variation is that the rice inside the dolma won't expand, and therefore the dolma won't be as plump as they should be.

■ Leftovers

- **Storing** - Cover the bowl or plate of dolma with plastic wrap and refrigerate the dish for up to several days. A dolma often improves in flavor as it sits in the refrigerator.

Part 3 Travelog

Europe and Asia, in the vicinity of Istanbul, are separated by the Bosphorus. This strait is among the busiest in the world: Jammed ferries crisscross it twenty four hours a day and private yachts and goliath warships steadily pass through it, as if on parade.

Going any which way are the fishing boats in search of the tasty bounty that may end up grilled that evening in one of the many hectic outdoor restaurants strung along the European shoreline.

The Asian, or Anatolian, side of the Bosphorus pulses at a slower rate. Within a few minutes' drive from the ferry terminal, I was in the midst of fertile farms and blooming orchards.

On this exploratory trip I met a farmer's wife who had earned a stellar reputation in the nearby village for her dolma. This word means "stuffed." The filling can be almost anything and the casing could be cabbage leaves or even a hollowed out cucumber, squash, or onion. Since the most celebrated combination is rice-stuffed vine leaves, yalanci dolma, I made sure that I learned how the farmer's wife prepared her version.

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