



Ellie was especially captivated by the simple task of sautéing onions, as shown her by Homa’s mother, Monir Khanom. “How a simple onion could transform from the peeled orb to the thin white slices to the petite cubes and then the sauteed brown translucence from the heat and fat in the copper pot, the caramelized scent that infused the house as the onion sizzled.” Among other uses, Homa’s mother showed her how fried onions could act as a filling for grape-leaf dolmehs, combined with rice and herbs.

Persian Grape Leaf Dolmehs

Makes 8 servings

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| 1 jar (16 ounces) grape leaves | ¼ cup chopped fresh tarragon (or 1
tablespoon dried) |
| 2 tablespoons olive oil | ¼ cup chopped parsley |
| 1 large onion, finely chopped | ¼ cup chopped cilantro |
| 2 cloves garlic minced | 1/3 cup chopped green onion |
| ½ pound ground beef | 1/3 cup chopped fresh dill (or 1
tablespoon dried) |
| 1 cup par-cooked basmati rice (see
note) | ½ cup barberries |
| ½ cup chana dal (yellow split chickpeas)
or yellow split peas, cooked (see note) | 1 ½ cups hot water |
| ½ teaspoon salt | Juice of 1 lemon |
| ¼ teaspoon black pepper | 1 tablespoon granulated sugar |

Make the filling: Heat olive oil in a pan over medium heat. Sauté onion and garlic until golden brown. Add ground beef and cook until browned. Add cooked chana dal, par-cooked rice and salt and pepper. Stir in tarragon, parsley, cilantro, green onion and dill and cook a few minutes. Finally, add the barberries and cook a few minutes more, stirring occasionally.

Wrap the dolmeh: Lay a grape leaf flat a work surface, rough side up. If the grape leaf has deep gaps, place another leaf on top so you have a bigger surface to work with. Spoon 1 tablespoon of filling in middle of leaf. Carefully, fold edges from the sides and overlap to cover filling and wrap the dolmeh into a square (or, roll up, if you find that easier). Carefully set it aside, folded side down. Repeat until all the filling is used up. (There will be grape leaves left over.)

Layer in the pot: Pour 1 tablespoon vegetable oil into a pot and cover the bottom with grape leaves. Place stuffed grape leaves tightly next to each other, overlapping side down. Repeat until bottom of pot is covered. Make sure they're tightly packed so they won't open up while cooking. Repeat layers until every dolmeh is in the pot.

Cook: Place a heatproof plate or a saucepan lid on top of the dolmeh and press a bit. Mix the 1 ½ cups hot water with lemon juice and sugar and pour it into the pot from the edges, then place the pot over medium heat and cover with a lid.

When the water starts simmering, lower heat and let dolmeh cook about 1 hour. After 1 hour, the water must be all absorbed and grape leaves should be cooked. Try one dolmeh; if it's soft, easy to bite and the rice is cooked completely, it's ready to serve. Serve on a platter, with additional barberries scattered over the top, with a sour cream/yogurt and cucumber sauce (such as tzatziki) on the side.

Notes: To par-cook rice, simply cook 1/3 cup raw rice in boiling water until it's soft on the outside and hard on the inside. This will take about 7 to 8 minutes. Drain and then measure 1 cup.

Chana dal is available at Indian Groceries and Spices, 10701 W. North Ave. To cook chana dal, soak in water first for an hour or longer, then cook in simmering water 45 minutes to hour. Cook yellow split peas by simmering in water about 45 minutes.

Grape leaves and dried barberries are available at Shirazi Persian Market, 2864 N. Oakland Ave., and may be at other Middle Eastern groceries.

Adapted from https://www.unicornsinthekitchen.com/wprm_print/persian-dolmeh-recipe