

BULGUR AND BEEF STUFFED VEGETABLES, A LEVANTINE RECIPE

Indian eggplant and small Japanese eggplant / Italian zucchini or Mexican Catura squash or Globe squash / Medium standing bell pepper, assorted colors / Long red Lipstick pepper or Anaheim pepper / Preserved wine leaves, or fresh chard leaves

Large bowl of water, juice of 1 lemon and salt

Filling:

18 oz ground beef
1 $\frac{3}{4}$ -to-2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups coarse bulgur, #3 or #4
1/3 -to-1/2 cup water
3 large red-wine tomatoes, peeled, grated
1 jumbo onion, finely diced
1 Anaheim chili pepper, finely diced
1 Jalapeno chili pepper, finely diced
1 small red chili pepper, finely diced
1 Tbsp pomegranate molasses, optional
1 Tbsp sumac, or more to taste
3 Tbsp tomato paste
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ Tbsp pepper paste
3 Tbsp oil
4 tsp salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp black pepper
1 tsp red Aleppo pepper
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp 7-spice or allspice, optional

Cooking liquid:

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup + 6 cups water
1-to-2 Tbsp pomegranate molasses
Half a lemon, juiced, or to taste
1-to-2 Tbsp tomato paste
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp pepper paste
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp chicken bouillon base
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp sumac
Salt

Add juice of one lemon and some salt to a large bowl of cold water.

Core vegetables, reserving tops, and add into bowl to prevent discoloration. Keep aside trimming pieces (not pulp) to use at bottom of pan. Rinse preserved vine leaves in plenty of warm water and snip stems at base of leaf. If using chard leaves, blanch and remove hard stems.

Make filling. Heat 3 tablespoons oil in a pan on medium heat; add tomato and pepper pastes and sauté 3 minutes. Add bulgur in increments as you stir; sauté about 5 minutes. Turn off heat; mix in 1/3-to-1/2 cup water, set aside to cool.

Once cooled, add remaining filling ingredients except beef and mix to combine well. Add beef and gently mix with the tip of your fingers just to combine (do not squish filling together).

Stuff filling into vegetables, without pressing it in tight, to about half an inch from the top; then cover with reserved tops. Roll vine or chard leaves; reserving torn leaves to use at the bottom of the pan.

In a small bowl combine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water, molasses, lemon juice, tomato and pepper pastes, bouillon base and sumac. This is your cooking liquid sauce.

Arrange reserved vegetable trimmings at the bottom of a large nonstick pot and then cover with reserved torn vine leaves. Arrange vegetables in this order: rolled vine or chard leaves (seam side down), zucchini, eggplant and lastly peppers; sprinkling with salt and some cooking liquid sauce between each layer evenly as you do so. Top with enough water to cover vegetables by half an inch; about 6 cups (depending on your pot).

Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, cover with a heavy inverted plate and lightly press down. Gently boil 5 minutes. Cover and simmer on medium-low heat 20-30 minutes until cooked to your liking (check occasionally after 20 minutes).

Drain liquid completely (reserving some in a bowl for re-heating purposes). Cover and simmer on low an additional 12 minutes. Turn off heat, let sit 8 minutes before serving.