

# Stuffed cabbage leaves

*This is a great dish for a special occasion. It may not be quick, but it's one to prepare when you have a willing accomplice in the kitchen, as in, 'You make the sauce, I'll make the stuffing, and we'll roll the parcels together.'*

## SERVES 4

12 outer leaves from a large Savoy cabbage

4 tablespoons soured cream, plus extra to serve (optional)

### FOR THE TOMATO SAUCE

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 onion, chopped

1 bay leaf

A couple of sprigs of thyme

1 carrot, chopped

1 celery stalk, chopped

2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

600g fresh, ripe tomatoes, skinned and chopped,  
OR a 400g tin plum tomatoes, roughly chopped, any stalky ends and skin removed

A pinch of sugar (optional)

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

### FOR THE FILLING

120g pearly spelt, rice or pearl barley

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 onion, chopped

1-2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

50g currants

~~50g walnuts, roughly chopped~~

Finely grated zest of 1 lemon

A bunch of parsley, chopped

A handful of dill, chopped

¼ teaspoon dried chilli flakes

1 large egg, lightly beaten

First make the tomato sauce. Heat the olive oil in a saucepan over a medium-low heat and sweat the onion, bay leaf and thyme for about 10 minutes until the onion is soft. Add the carrot and celery and sauté for a further 5 minutes, then stir in the garlic and cook for a minute. Add the tomatoes with their juice, some salt and pepper, and a pinch of sugar if you like. Simmer gently until thickened, about 15 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. If the midribs of the cabbage leaves are thick, pare the thickest part down a bit with a vegetable peeler. Bring a pan of lightly salted water to the boil and blanch the cabbage leaves for 2-3 minutes. Drain and refresh under the cold tap, then pat the leaves dry with a tea towel or kitchen paper.

To make the filling, cook the spelt, rice or barley according to the packet instructions. Heat the olive oil in a small pan, add the onion and sweat over a low heat until soft but not coloured. Add the garlic and stir for a minute. Tip the onion and garlic into a bowl and add the spelt, rice or barley, the currants, walnuts, lemon zest, chopped herbs and chilli flakes. Season very generously with salt and pepper, stir until well mixed, then add the egg and stir again until combined.

Lay the blanched cabbage leaves out on a clean surface. Place a big spoonful of the filling mixture in the centre of each leaf, fold over the sides and roll up from the stalk end, so you have 12 neat packages. Place them in an ovenproof dish, seam side down.

Spoon the tomato sauce over the stuffed leaves, dot some soured cream on top and sprinkle with pepper. Bake for 30-35 minutes until piping hot. Serve with more soured cream, if you like.

### VARIATIONS

Instead of cabbage, you can use large fresh or preserved vine leaves, blanching fresh ones for 1 minute only; preserved leaves just need to be rinsed well. Alternatively, you can use the leaves of spring or winter greens: remove coarse stalks and blanch the leaves for a minute or two, to soften.

recipe x 3  
add rosemary