

Dolmades are a Mediterranean dish that is delicious as appetizers or as part of a meal. The word dolma simply means “stuffed thing”. The “things” are usually stuffed into grape leaves and rolled up like a cigar. Grape leaves that are ready for stuffing are usually available in the grocery store in the vegetable section or the pickle section. They are steamed, stacked and ready to roll. It just so happens that Chard has a similar texture and suppleness to its leaves as grape leaves, and for this reason, makes a great substitute for them. I remembered that when it came up in a conversation with one of our workers who said that he and his wife make them with chard. I asked him to share their recipe and here it is, sounds like a great meal!

**I think that the chard leaves will be sturdier and more pliable if they are lightly steamed first.

1st option

Take whole Swiss chard leaves rinse and remove center.

You can make a filling of just about anything, but be sure to include eggs, cottage cheese and some bread crumbs and a little garlic and some Italian seasoning, kind of like what you would put into lasagna. I grated some carrots in and we had some leftover chicken so I put that in the little food processor that we have to chop it up fine, but not to a paste. Mix that together with the cheese and eggs mixture.

Then I just started filling and rolling like cabbage rolls. I placed all of the rolls in a covered baking dish with 4 Tblsp water and baked them for about 1/2 hour at 350. You can serve them with heated pasta sauce.

The 2nd option is for when you get bored with rolling them up and you take the whole chard leaf rinsed and leave the center in it. Put about 2 Tblsp of olive oil in the bottom of a 13 x 9 baking dish and then put in some pasta sauce, about a1 cup, and place the leaf bottom side down in it to coat it. Now take the rest of the filling and place it on one side of the top of the leaf and fold the other side over it. Your filling should be a little sticky here. Put more pasta sauce on top and some parmesan cheese. Cover with foil and bake for about 1/2 hour at 350.

It was very good both ways, you should try it while you still have the fresh chard leaves ~

I have made dolmades in the past using leftover rice and some cooked lentils. Susan is right to add something to make it sticky enough to hold together, but I serve it as an appetizer and don't usually bake it so I have never used egg, but I look forward to trying them! It helps if you are using rice, if the rice is a little sticky, but a little lemon juice and/or cottage cheese helps, too. For appetizers, I might start by sautéing half an onion chopped fine in olive oil, adding a little garlic, then mix the cooked rice and lentils (maybe 1 cup each) with some toasted pine nuts, pistachios or walnuts, fresh lemon juice, dried, soaked currants (they are smaller and sweeter than raisins), and add seasonings like cinnamon and mint or ginger and coriander. When filling is cool, put a spoonful on each leaf and roll tightly like a burrito to about the size of ½ a big cigar. Chill and serve. (Drizzle more lemon juice over them before serving if desired.)