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## Vegetarian Stuffed Vegetables Recipe

*Middle Eastern comfort food for Meatless Monday*

Feb 10, 2014 12:00 pm

BY RAWIA BISHARA

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Photo: Peter Cassidy

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Play around with the spices and herbs you use in this traditional vegetarian Middle Eastern recipe.

*A strong contender for "Favorite Cookbook of the Season" is Brooklyn Chef Rawia Bishara's Olives, Lemons & Za'atar: The Best Middle Eastern Home Cooking. Her Bay Ridge restaurant, [Tanoreen](http://www.tanoreen.com/) (<http://www.tanoreen.com/>), has been recognized by critics and media alike as one of the best Middle Eastern restaurants in New York. Update your "must-visit" list and make these vegetarian stuffed eggplants, potatoes, tomatoes and squash for a memorable Meatless Monday.*

If a vegetable can be stuffed, an Arab cook will stuff it! It may seem odd when it comes to potatoes, but it is second nature to me since my mother never missed a chance to use them. This stuffing is rather traditional — feel free to play with the spices and herbs to suit your

taste. But keep in mind that the softer the vegetable, the more loosely packed with stuffing it should be; if a vegetable like Arabic squash is overfilled, the vegetable will burst during cooking. To serve, either arrange the whole vegetables on dinner plates with the sauce on the side, or split them lengthwise and drizzle the sauce over the top.

*Reprinted with permission from Olives, Lemons And Za'atar* (<http://www.amazon.com/Olives-Lemons-Zaatar-Eastern-Cooking/dp/1906868840?tag=foodrepu-20>)

**Servings:** 4

**Ingredients**

- 4 baby eggplants, rinsed, stem end trimmed and reserved
- 4 Arabic squash (or pale-skinned calabacita), rinsed, stem end trimmed and reserved
- 4 plum tomatoes, rinsed, stem end trimmed and reserved
- 4 baking potatoes, rinsed, narrow end trimmed and reserved

**Stuffing**

- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2 medium yellow or red onions, cut into small dice
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped (optional)
- 4 1/2 teaspoons ground allspice
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper, or to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin (optional)
- 1 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill
- 1 tablespoon dried mint
- 1/4 cup tomato paste
- 1 jalapeño or long hot chile pepper, cored, seeded and cut into small dice (optional)
- 6 plum tomatoes, diced
- 1/4 cup pomegranate molasses
- sea salt to taste
- 3 cups Egyptian rice or cracked wheat
- juice of 2 lemons

**Directions:**

1. Using an apple corer, remove the insides of the eggplant, squash, tomatoes and potatoes, reserving only the insides of the squash. Place the cored vegetables in a large bowl of cold salted water and set aside.
2. Prepare the stuffing: In a large skillet, heat 1/2 cup olive oil over medium-high heat. Toss in the onions and saute until soft and fragrant, about 3 minutes. Add the garlic, if using, and saute until fragrant, 1 minute. Sprinkle in the allspice, black pepper, nutmeg and cumin, if using, and saute until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the parsley, cilantro, dill and mint and stir until the cilantro changes color, about 1 minute. Stir in 2 tablespoons tomato paste, the reserved squash flesh, the chile pepper, if using, tomatoes, and 2 tablespoons pomegranate molasses.
3. Raise the heat and bring the mixture to a boil. Season with salt. Remove from the heat and stir in the rice until thoroughly combined. Stir in half of the lemon juice and the remaining 1/2 cup olive oil. Taste and adjust the seasonings.
4. Drain the vegetables soaking in cold water. Working with one vegetable at a time, pat it

dry and spoon the stuffing to within 1/2 inch of the opening. Place the vegetables, vertically with the open end up, in a 5-quart pot. Repeat with remaining vegetables.

5. Replace the reserved trimmed end to each vegetable. Add enough water to cover, the remaining 2 tablespoons each of tomato paste and pomegranate molasses, and the remaining half lemon juice to the pot. Cover the vegetables with a heatproof plate, cover the pot and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat and simmer until the rice is tender, 35 to 40 minutes.
6. Using a slotted spoon, remove the vegetables to a platter and spoon the sauce in the pot on the side.

### Try out these Middle Eastern recipes on Food Republic:

- [The Perfect Basic Tabbouleh Recipe](http://www.foodrepublic.com/2011/04/04/perfect-basic-tabbouleh-recipe) (<http://www.foodrepublic.com/2011/04/04/perfect-basic-tabbouleh-recipe>)
- [The Best Basic Hummus Recipe](http://www.foodrepublic.com/2011/05/14/best-basic-hummus-recipe) (<http://www.foodrepublic.com/2011/05/14/best-basic-hummus-recipe>)
- [The Best Basic Falafel Recipe](http://www.foodrepublic.com/2011/05/12/best-basic-falafel-recipe) (<http://www.foodrepublic.com/2011/05/12/best-basic-falafel-recipe>)

**Level of Difficulty:** Moderate

**Prep Time:** 35 minutes

**Cooking Time:** 1 hour, 10 minutes

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