



Stuffed peppers - Rioja style

This is in fact a typical dish in the north of Spain: especially Rioja and the Basque regions.

The preparation is in 3 phases: 1. Sauce, 2. Stuffing, 3. Cooking and Presentation. This recipe can be a main course for 6 people, or tapas for a larger group, and uses a type of small red pepper - "pimiento del piquillo" - which is often canned. They're sweet peppers, but have just a touch of "hot". You'll probably need to use sweet red peppers as a substitute - they're bigger so you'll only need 4 or 5 for this quantity of stuffing.

Important: If the peppers are fresh, they'll need to be oven roasted and have the skin removed before you start with this recipe. If you use the canned variety, you can use them straight out of the can.

(For those who are not used to metric recipes, 0.5 kilo is about 1 lb, and 0.1 liter is just under 4 fluid ounces.)

1. The sauce

Ingredients:

0.1 lt. of olive oil

2 cloves of garlic

1 spoonfull of flour (tablespoon)

0.5 kilo of ripe tomato

0.2 lt. of white wine

1 small spoonful paprika (teaspoon)

0.25 kilo onion

1 laurel leaf

salt

Preparation:

Lightly brown chopped garlic in hot oil; add chopped onion and cook over low heat for 15 min. Add flour, paprika and stir; add diced tomato, laurel, wine and a little salt. Cook slowly for 15 min., stirring from time to time; strain sauce and set aside.

2. The stuffing

Ingredients:

2 spoonfulls of breadcrumbs (tablespoon)

1 egg

0.5 kilo finely ground pork (1 pound)

2 spoonfulls of chopped parsley (tablespoon)

1 medium onion (finely chopped)

1/4 cup of cognac or brandy

2 spoonfulls of olive oil

Salt and pepper

1 can of piquillo peppers (12 peppers)

Preparation:

Slowly cook finely chopped onion in oil, until soft and slightly golden color, stir in the ground pork. Let cool.

Mix cooled onion & meat with the breadcrumbs, egg, cognac, parsley, salt and pepper to form a compact mass. Divide into portions for each pepper; and fill peppers with the stuffing.

Cooking and Presentation:

A. Dredge stuffed peppers in flour, then in beaten egg. Fry in a small amount of olive oil on medium heat until golden brown.

B. Place fried stuffed peppers in casserole, cover with sauce and cook in oven at medium temperature for about 15 minutes. Serve hot.

It sounds a little complicated, but it's not so bad. This can be prepared ahead and you only need to do step "B" just before serving.

This is in fact the basis for many other typical Spanish dishes - the sauce made from onion, garlic, tomato, etc. is seen in many other recipes. The battered and fried vegetables are also typical of northern Spanish cooking.

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