

Onions and Tomatoes Stuffed with Meat and Herbs

Sevoya i tomat reynadas

Small onions and ripe plum tomatoes are hollowed out and stuffed with ground meat, scallions and herbs. They are lightly coated in egg and flour and briefly sautéed before gently simmering them on a bed of chopped vegetables and tomato broth. The 'Reynadas' are finally lightly browned in the oven allowing the flavours to meld to perfection. Once you get the knack of preparing this popular Sephardic dish it will undoubtedly become a favourite winter comfort food.

Serve it with a rice pilaf and even just some crusty bread to mop up the juices. Buen provecho, bon appétit !!

about 10 small oval shaped onions and 10 small ripe Roma or plum tomatoes

For the filling:

500g (1lb 2oz) minced (ground) beef

1 cup finely chopped flat-leaf parsley

½ cup roughly chopped dill

½ cup finely chopped spring onions (scallions)

1 large ripe tomato, cut in half, seeded and coarsely grated (about 2 tbsp)

4 slices white bread, crusts removed, dampened in ½ cup water, squeezed and torn into small pieces

1 egg, lightly beaten

salt and finely ground black pepper

For the vegetable base:

3 tbsp olive oil

1 large onion, roughly chopped, plus reserved chopped onion

4 spring onions, roughly chopped

2 tender celery stalks with leaves, chopped

2 large potatoes, peeled and diced

½ cup canned chopped tomatoes, plus reserved tomato pulp

½ cup hot water

½ tsp sugar

sea salt and finely ground white pepper

For shallow frying:

vegetable or grape-seed oil

For coating:

prepare ½ cup plain (all-purpose) flour in a shallow bowl and 2 eggs, lightly beaten, in another

For cooking:

2 cups hot chicken stock

You will need:

A shallow casserole, about 33cm (13in) in diameter, with a lid

Prepare the onions: Discard the outer skin and halve the onions lengthways. Retain the outer two layers as cases for stuffing. Reserve the remainder of the onions and chop for the base.

Prepare the tomatoes: Cut the tomatoes vertically in half through the core. Hollow out the tomatoes using a spoon and carefully scoop as much pulp and seeds from each tomato as you can, without piercing the skin. Lightly sprinkle a little salt in the tomato shells and turn them over to drain for 10 minutes. Deseed and chop the tomato pulp and reserve for the base.

Make the filling: Combine all the ingredients together in a large bowl. Add about 1½ tsp salt and a grind of black pepper. If preparing ahead, refrigerate until ready for use.

Make the vegetable base: Heat the oil in the casserole over a medium-high heat. Add all the chopped vegetables and cook for 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in the canned tomatoes and reserved tomato pulp, hot water, sugar, and season with salt and pepper. Bring to a boil. Cover, reduce the heat and simmer for 20 minutes or until the vegetables are tender. Add hot water as necessary.

Stuff the onions and tomatoes: Fill the cavities with the meat mixture and flatten to the level of the brim of the vegetable shells. Heat 1.25cm (½in) oil in a large frying pan over a medium-high heat. In batches lightly coat the filled side only with the flour then dip the floured side of the stuffed vegetable into the egg. Fry the filled side and the base of the onions until golden brown. Fry the tomatoes on the filled-side only. Drain the fried vegetables on paper towels.

To cook: On the prepared vegetable base, gently arrange the stuffed onions in the centre of the pan and the stuffed tomatoes on the perimeter, meat side up. Pour in enough hot stock to come midway up the stuffed vegetables. Bring to a boil. Cover, reduce the heat and simmer for 45 minutes or until the vegetables and meat are cooked through. Shake the pan from time to time to prevent the vegetables from catching. Add a little hot water as necessary.

To serve: Preheat the oven to 200°C (400°F). Place the rack in the top third of the oven. Put the casserole uncovered in the oven for the tops of the vegetables to brown lightly. Usually 15 minutes is enough but keep watching. Serve hot in the casserole or, using a slotted spoon, carefully lift the stuffed onions and tomatoes out of the pan. Pour the vegetables and tomato sauce on to a large platter with a rim and top with the stuffed vegetables. Serve with a Spanish fried rice pilaf. Enjoy this mellow prepare-ahead family meal!

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