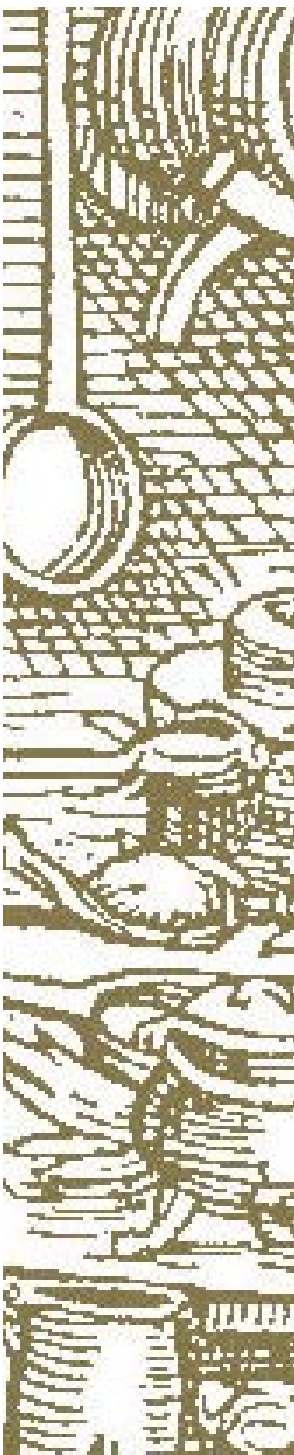




ANNIE EVANS
THE DIG COOK



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RECIPES FOR ARCHAEOLOGISTS

Just for a change, I thought I'd write about ingredients. There are plenty of cooks who think that they can get away with tossing some less-than-wonderful ingredients into a dish. The thinking seems to be that some reduction in quality here and there won't be noticed in the finished product. I disagree. In my view, the best result can only be obtained by using the best possible ingredients.

I started thinking about this while in Greece recently, cooking for the Mount Lykaion Project in the Peloponnese. The project is investigating an ancient mountain-top altar where sacrifices were made over a period of several thousand years. In Greece I came to realise that while modern European nations may be better endowed with many facilities and products, a price has been paid for convenience and the constant availability of foods that really ought to be seasonal.

In the seaside village of Limionas on the island of Chios I buy large, golden peaches with rich red patterning on their skin. The scent of the fruit is intense. Their flesh is soft and perfectly ripe.

This fruit has come straight from the tree, picked at the very last moment and ready to eat. It won't last: within 24 hours it will be past its prime but right now it is peach perfection. I know of nowhere in my world where I can buy peaches as good as these. Stone fruit in supermarkets in the USA, UK and Australia is picked too early, often travels a great distance

and arrives in store well before maturity. The result is that it is hard, has little flavour and may never ripen.

We in the so-called affluent nations are being swindled of the goodness that is part of the nature of our fruit and vegetables. In the case of the tomato, supermarket chains have forced growers to supply a product that will withstand packing and transport and look deliciously red under the artificial lighting of the stores. These tomatoes are a fraud: they have very little taste. They are a pallid imitation of what a tomato ought to be.

Those people who are fortunate enough to travel to the Mediterranean in summer should venture into a market or village store to find out what peaches and tomatoes ought to taste like. As a lover of good produce I'm offended and disgusted at the way in which supermarket chains have stolen and debauched our fresh fruit and vegetables. Until we refuse to buy such rubbish the supermarkets will continue to stock fruit and vegetables that are an insult to nature and their customers. Where possible, I buy produce from farmers' markets, the farm gate or stores that specialise in local products.

The following recipes for stuffed vegetables provide the vegetarian alternative that is an essential element in the day's meals at any field project.

“ SUPERMARKET CHAINS HAVE STOLEN AND DEBAUCHED OUR FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES ”



Vegetables stuffed with Rice

Quantities are for 30 people with the dish intended as the vegetable component of the main meal of the day. Triple the quantities if this is to be the entire meal.

INGREDIENTS

- 15 firm ripe medium-sized tomatoes
- 15 medium-sized green peppers (capsicums)
- 15 small eggplants (long and thin or globular)
- 15 zucchini
- 1 kilo potatoes (2.2 pounds)
- 500 ml (2 cups) olive oil
- 15 spring onions (shallots), finely chopped

- 1 kilo long grain rice
- 8 cloves garlic
- 4 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- salt and pepper
- 1 large bunch chopped fresh parsley
- 1 large bunch chopped fresh mint

METHOD

To prepare vegetables carefully cut the tops off the tomatoes and retain to use as lids. Scoop out the flesh and seeds and set aside in a bowl. Repeat with the capsicums, carefully removing and discarding white pith and seeds.

If the eggplants (aubergines) are the long thin type, cut lengthways and scrape out the insides keeping the skins intact. Put the flesh in with the set-aside tomato flesh. If the eggplants are globular, use small ones. Cut the tops off and set aside. Scoop out the flesh and set aside with the tomato flesh. Small eggplants should not need salting.

The zucchini are treated in the same way. Peel potatoes, cut into wedges and set aside. In a large frying pan heat 150 ml of the oil and add the shallots. Cook for three minutes then stir in garlic, cinnamon, rice, tomato, eggplant and zucchini flesh.

Add enough water to cover the mixture and simmer, covered, for 10 minutes until rice is tender and most of

the liquid has been absorbed. Stir the parsley and mint into the rice filling. Taste and season as necessary with salt and pepper. Remove from the heat.

Pre-heat oven to medium (180 degrees centigrade or 350 degrees Fahrenheit).

Arrange the vegetable shells in large roasting pans. Stuff the vegetables with the rice mixture and replace the lids on the tomatoes and peppers and the halves to eggplants and zucchinis.

Pour enough water into the pans to just cover the bases.

Place the potato wedges into a plastic bag with one tablespoon of olive oil and shake until thoroughly coated. Place potatoes around and on top of the stuffed vegetables. Drizzle remaining olive oil over the vegetables and bake for 50-60 minutes or until the vegetables are well cooked. Baste the vegetables with the pan juices several times during cooking but try not to disturb them as they may

This dish can be served hot or cold and is wonderful with warm, crusty bread.

Annie Evans