



Classic Cabbage Rolls



Ingredients for the cabbage rolls:

- 16-18 large cabbage leaves
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 ½ pounds lean ground beef
- 1 cup cooked rice
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- ½ cup milk

Ingredients for the sauce:

- 1 15-ounce can tomato sauce
- 1 15-ounce can diced tomatoes (do not drain)
- ¼ cup light brown sugar
- ¼ cup white balsamic vinegar
- ¼ cup water
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch mixed with ¼ cup water
- ¼ cup chopped parsley leaves for garnish

Method:

1. Preheat oven to 375F.
2. Heat a large pot of salted water over high heat until boiling. Drop the cabbage leaves, a few at a time, into the boiling water. Cover and cook for about 3 minutes or until wilted and pliable. Remove with tongs to a strainer to drain. Repeat until all leaves are par-boiled. Remove the thick central ribs by cutting along both sides of the rib in a long narrow triangle. Discard ribs. Set leaves aside. (SEE NOTES BELOW)
3. Heat oil in a large ovenproof skillet (or Dutch oven) over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add the onion and cook until starting to caramelize, about 5 minutes. Add the



garlic and crushed red pepper flakes and sauté for 30-seconds. Remove the skillet from the heat. Transfer half the onion to a large mixing bowl.

4. Off heat, add the ground beef, cooked rice, salt, pepper, egg, and milk to the remaining onion mixture in the skillet. Stir with a wooden spoon to combine. Divide the ground beef and rice mixture evenly between the 16 cabbage leaves. Overlap the cut ends of the cabbage to prevent the filling from spilling out. Place the filling over the area that overlaps and fold in the sides. Roll the leaf tightly around the filling to create a tidy roll. Place the cabbage roll, seam side down, in the now empty skillet, Dutch oven, or baking dish. Repeat until all filling is used.

To prepare the sauce:

1. In the mixing bowl with the remaining onions, add the tomato sauce, diced tomatoes, brown sugar, vinegar, and water. Pour over the cabbage rolls. Cover the skillet with a lid or foil and bake until the sauce is bubbling and the rolls are heated through, about 45 minutes. Remove the lid and spoon some of the sauce over the cabbage rolls. Continue to bake, uncovered, for an additional 15 minutes.
2. Carefully remove the cabbage rolls to a serving plate. Put the skillet with the sauce on the stovetop and heat on medium. Whisk together the cornstarch and water and slowly add to the sauce in the skillet. Heat until thickened. Pour the tomato sauce over the cabbage rolls and serve immediately garnished with parsley.

Recipe Notes:

There are two different methods I can recommend for preparing (precooking) the cabbage leaves. Core the cabbage and carefully peel off the leaves taking care not to tear them. For this first method, you can boil the leaves for a few minutes in a stockpot of salted water. If you have a hard time removing the tight leaves from the head of cabbage, place the whole cored head in a large mixing bowl covered with plastic wrap. Microwave for 3 minutes on high until the outer leaves of cabbage are pliable and translucent. Carefully remove the wilted, outer leaves with tongs and repeat the process until you have enough for the recipe. You can do one method or the other, or a combination of both. Alternatively, you can place the whole cored head in a pot of boiling water and with a set of tongs, peel the leaves as they release. Whichever method you use, make sure you can bend and roll the leaves easily to form the rolls.