



Ukrainian cabbage rolls known as holubtsi, *Голубці* literally means "little pigeons". They are also served at many family gatherings and celebrations.

Babcia's recipe was simple, wrap cooked rice in steamed cabbage leaves, cover with tomato sauce, add some butter and bake until done.

Then again, rice may have been a luxury, so then she made her Holubtsi with buckwheat and baked them slowly until they were very tender. Her test for doneness; the largest cabbage roll, from the center of the pan, should easily cut with a fork. Keep cooking until this is the case. When cabbage is out of season, old, or heavily veined, longer cooking times are required.

Today, fillings for cabbage rolls vary widely; they can be meatless or include combination of ground meats, vegetables, white rice and various grains. Some cooks only use short grain rice, some par boiled long grain rice. Cabbage for the wrappers can be green, Savoy, cured in sauerkraut or beet leaves. Cooking liquids vary, including water, broth, mushroom stock, tomato juice; some Ukrainian cooks swear by using only Ragù tomato sauce when baking their holubtsi. Some cooks add oil and some add butter.... So they can readily slide down your throat.

One more thing, Babcia never needed tooth picks to keep her cabbage rolls together; all she would do is give each one a good squeeze and they would never ever open. My godmother taught me this secret.

Serving cabbage rolls also varies at each house; some serve them hot with sour cream or with a sauce made by cooking a chopped onion in whipping or sour cream. You can also serve them with a mushroom gravy. Then again, Babcia had her secret ingredient... **Zaprashka for Holubtsi**

Near serving time, she would prepare her zapraska by blending equal amounts of butter or oil and flour in a skillet, then poured liquid from the baking pan into the zapraska and then add back to the pot. The stuffed cabbage rolls would simmer for another 15 min. with the added zapraska. This is like making a sauce from the cooking liquids.



Secrets of Making Cabbage Rolls

Best cabbage for making cabbage rolls is green or spring cabbage and savoy cabbage: as the dense leaves of large heads of winter cabbage are very difficult to separate and make the rolls.



Cured cabbage is another option, available at some delis. For a piquant taste, layer sauerkraut throughout the holubtsi roasting pan... this is a Christmas favourite.



In preparing any cabbage, remove tough outer leaves, rinse, and core the cabbage. Typically, whole cabbage heads are blanched; they are submerged core-side down in a large pot of hot water. When the cabbage softens, peel the outer leaves; submerge the head again until the next layer is ready to be removed. And so on, and so on, until you have enough leaves.

Another method is to freeze it! Place the cabbage head in a large plastic freezer bag and freeze the cabbage whole. When ready to use, defrost the cabbage and the leaves will peel off easily.

You can also microwave a cored cabbage head, for about 6 min. on high. Peel off the outer leaves and then nuke again so the next round of leaves can be peeled off until you have enough leaves.

When making cabbage rolls, remember they are called "little pigeons", and should be made with no more than couple spoonful's of filling. Cut larger leaves in half lengthwise and roll the filling in cabbage, then give them a good squeeze in your palms; trust me, they will not open.

When roasting them, I line the roaster with foil wrap and a layer of leaves on top. Then place the rolls vertically or standing up in the pan, rather than in layers. Also, before roasting salt the rolls well to develop the flavours.



Another secret concerning baking holubtsi is that when you add acid or tomato based cooking liquids it takes longer to cook as the acid maintains the cabbage crispy or crunchy. Also, when baking cabbage rolls, add some fat, I add canola oil, my mother added butter for richer tasting holubtsi.

Serve meatless cabbage rolls as a side dish for pork or grilled meats. As a main dish, serve hot with sour cream or with a sauce made by cooking a chopped onion in sour cream.

Fillings for Holubtsi

Fillings for holubtsi should be well seasoned; because the cabbage gives, a flat taste to the finished product by absorbing the seasoning.

Basic Rice

- 2 cups **Long Grain Rice** (washed)
- 1 cup **Short Grain Rice** (washed)
- 6 cups boiling **Water**
- 3 tsps. **Salt**
- 1 tsp. **Pepper**
- 1 tsp. **Celery Salt**
- 1/2 cup **Fried Onions** fried in Canola Oil
- 1/2 cup unsalted **Butter**



- ♦ Fry onions in canola oil.
- ♦ Add salt, pepper, celery salt, butter and fried onions to boiling water and stir.
- ♦ Add both rices and simmer until rice is almost cooked and water is absorbed, about 2-15 min.

Variations to the Basic Rice Filling

- ♦ Substitute a rich soup stock or vegetable broth for the water.
- ♦ Cook the rice in equal amounts of tomato juice and water.
- ♦ Add 1 cup or more of chopped fresh mushrooms to the pan when frying the onions and add to the rice mixture.
- ♦ Add 1/2 lb. cooked ground pork or ham to the rice filling.
- ♦ Add 1/4 cup or more chopped fresh dill to the rice filling.



Rice fillings can be used when making cabbage rolls with savoy cabbage.

Take it-Along Tip...

When you are bringing cabbage rolls to a celebration, undercook them by about 10-15 min. Wrap the casserole in foil and overwrap with a warm blanket to keep them warm. Remember to bring some sour cream as well.

Sour Cabbage Rolls - Kvásna Kapústa Holubsti

Sour cabbage is a head of cabbage that was added to the crock when making sauerkraut. You can find heads of sour cabbage at Polish delis.

2 heads Sour or Pickled Cabbage

4 Tb. Canola Oil

1 large Onion, chopped

4 cloves of Garlic, chopped

1 lb. Ground Turkey

6 medium Mushrooms,

1 cup of Rice

2 small cans of **Tomato Sauce**

small bunch of **Parsley**, chopped

1 large **Egg**

Salt and Pepper to taste

2 **Bay Leaves**

chopped **Paprika**

Parsley for garnish

- ♦ Save the pickling juice. Wash sour cabbage in warm water; squeeze gently. Repeat 4 or 5 times to remove the brine. Drain on paper towel. Cut out cabbage core; set aside. Larger leaves may be cut into 2-4 pieces; leave smaller leaves whole. Set aside.
- ♦ *Prepare filling*; fry onion in oil in large frying pan, until just tender; add garlic and mushrooms; cook for about 10 min.
- ♦ Combine cooked vegetables with turkey, rice, tomato sauce, egg and parsley. Season to taste. Set aside to cool for 20-30 min.
- ♦ To assemble, in a large heavy pan or small roaster, line the bottom and sides with foil. Make cabbage rolls by adding 1 Tb. filling and roll, tucking in the ends. Stand rolls in rows around the pan. Continue until all filling and cabbage is used.
- ♦ Pour pickling juice and water to just cover the rolls. Cover and place in 350 F. oven. Continue cooking for 2-1/2 hours, until cabbage is tender.

