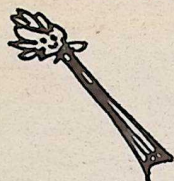
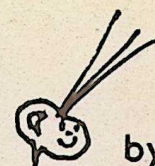


From Aunt Olivia's kitchen



The ABCs of stuffing



by Lydia Lovell



In winter months, when we think of stuffing, we think of poultry . . . chicken, duck, goose, turkey . . . but in summer, we stuff a number of other foods . . . mostly vegetables such as avocado, artichokes, beets, mushrooms, onions, peppers, potatoes, squash, tomatoes. Sometimes we stuff clam shells, too. At least you do if you were brought up preparing food under the tutelage of a cook such as Aunt Olivia. As a matter of fact, practically anything that grew with a hollow center, or one she could hollow out, she stuffed.

Perhaps Aunt Olivia was challenged to find combinations of flavors that blended compatibly, flavors that actually enhanced one another, or combinations of colors that made a dish particularly attractive. A good example of using color to brighten an otherwise prosaic potato salad is Aunt Olivia's **Stuffed Beets**. First prepare a simple potato salad.

1/2 C. cooked diced potatoes	1/2 C. chopped celery
2 T. vinegar	1 sm. green pepper, chopped
2 T. mayonnaise	1 hard-boiled egg, sliced
1/4 t. salt	6 medium beets, cooked
1/8 t. pepper	lettuce leaves

In a large bowl, blend vinegar, mayonnaise, salt, and pepper. Add potatoes, celery, green pepper, and egg. Toss together and refrigerate. Cook beets whole until tender (about 40 minutes). Cool enough to handle, slip off skins and prepare to stuff by scooping out center with a melon baller, leaving a shell about 1/2 inch thick. (Add beet balls to leftover sweet pickle juice, refrigerate overnight or longer, and

serve on a relish tray.) Just before serving, spoon potato salad into beet shells and arrange on lettuce. Colorful!

Uncle Henry preferred what he called 'plain cooking,' and seldom did Aunt Olivia try to tempt him with experimental foods that violated that description but, after discovering the delicate flavor of artichokes, she set herself the task of preparing them to please Uncle Henry. After taste-testing the following dish, he admitted he found no fault with it except the energy involved, he thought, was more than was warranted. Aunt Olivia, on the other hand, was particularly fond of **Stuffed Artichokes**: she considered herself well-rewarded for her time and effort.

First she cooked six artichokes in boiling salted water for 45 minutes until tender. Then, with scissors, she snipped the tough and spiny ends off all the leaves and spread them to reveal the 'choke' which she removed entirely with a sharp knife, leaving the sweet tender 'heart' undisturbed. In a small skillet, she sauteed chopped stems and caps of 1/2 lb. button mushrooms and two cloves of minced garlic in 3 T. olive oil for five minutes. After removing pan from heat, she stirred in about 1/2 cup of soft breadcrumbs, four finely snipped rosemary leaves, and salt and pepper to taste. She placed the spread out hearts of artichoke in a large shallow baking dish, heaped each with the mushroom stuffing, topped that with a thin slice of Ricotta cheese and a generous sprinkling of Parmesan cheese. After 15 minutes in a 400° oven, these were ready to eat. Uncle Henry usually left about half of the artichoke leaves on his plate and Aunt Olivia and I saved them for snacking, but he polished off the cheesy hearts and stuffing without complaint.

An entirely different dish is **Stuffed Sweet Peppers** although one might easily be led to believe they were similar. Aunt Henry needed no cajoling to pronounce these first rate.

1 lb. lean hamburger	1 4-oz. bottle capers, chopped
1 chopped onion	1 doz. large seedless raisins
3 cloves garlic, minced	1 8-oz. can tomato sauce
1 4-oz. bottle stuffed olives	6 large sweet peppers
	2 T. olive oil

In a heavy skillet, fry meat over a slow fire, stirring frequently to break into small pieces. Drain through a sieve and discard fat. Set aside. Fry onion, garlic, olives, capers, and raisins in olive oil, stirring until onion is golden. Add meat and half the tomato sauce, cover, and simmer while you cut a large hole in the top of each pepper, remove seeds and pulp, and wash thoroughly in hot water. Stuff pepper shells with meat mixture and place in a lightly greased casserole with a close-fitting cover. Spoon rest of tomato sauce around and over peppers. Cover and bake at 325° for 45 minutes or until pepper shells are fork-tender. Serve with steamed rice and Boston lettuce dressed with oil and vinegar.

Aunt Olivia's file contains two recipes for **Stuffed Cabbage**; basically similar, they are just enough different to deserve equal treatment. The first is gingery; the second, flavored with apricots. Try both to see which your family prefers. First, make the one with ginger.

12 large cabbage leaves	1/2 C. seedless raisins
1 lb. hamburger	2 T. vinegar
1 minced onion	2 C. canned tomatoes w/juice
1/2 C. cooked rice	1/4 C. dark corn syrup
salt and pepper to taste	20 to 24 gingersnaps

Place cabbage leaves in a large saucepan and cover with boiling water. Set aside to soak. In a medium bowl, mix meat, onion, rice, salt and pepper. Drain cabbage leaves. In each leaf, place 2 to 3 heaping T. of meat. Fold sides over, roll cabbage leaf up, and fasten with a toothpick. Place rolls in a Dutch oven. Mix remaining ingredients, except gingersnaps, and pour over rolls. Add just enough water to cover. Bring to a boil and simmer, covered, for one hour. Layer gingersnaps over tops of cabbage rolls. Cover and simmer another hour. Serves six.

I rate **Stuffed Cabbage Apricot** slightly higher, but it's a matter of personal preference.

12 large cabbage leaves	1/2 t. each, salt and pepper
1 lb. hamburger	1 10-oz. can tomatoes
2 T. uncooked brown rice	juice of 2 lemons
1 egg	1/4 C. dark brown sugar
1 minced onion	1/2 C. apricot preserves

Place cabbage leaves in a large saucepan and cover with boiling water. Set aside to soak. Combine meat, rice, egg, onion, and seasonings. Drain cabbage leaves, fill each with 3 T. meat mixture, fasten with toothpicks, and place in Dutch oven. Mix remaining ingredients together and pour over rolls. Add water, just to cover, if necessary. Bring to boil, reduce heat, cover, and simmer 2 1/2 hours.

For variety . . . and believe me, one of the most important things fine cooks learn is that variety brings people back, again and again . . . Aunt Olivia never failed to please our entire family when the menu featured **Stuffed Clams**. When she presided over the kitchen, Aunt Olivia used sea clams, but I don't know of a single market where they can be purchased today, so I settle for quahogs when I can get them and canned clams when I cannot. Neither is as good, but either is better than none at all.

1/4 lb. butter	2 T. Parmesan cheese
2 T. tomato juice	1/8 t. garlic powder
2 T. minced onion	1/8 t. celery salt
2 t. dry mustard	2 T. fresh-snipped parsley
2 T. Worcestershire sauce	2 T. chopped green pepper
1 t. poultry seasoning	salt and pepper to taste
2 T. mayonnaise	1 T. lemon juice
	1 pt. (3 6-oz. cans clams/juice)
	2 C. soda cracker crumbs

In a large mixing bowl, soften butter and mix with all ingredients except clams and cracker crumbs. Then add clams and juice and crumbs and stir thoroughly. Allow to rest for ten minutes. Fill sea clam shells (or individual-serving-size ovenware . . . I use small aluminum tart pans). Sprinkle with paprika and bake on a cookie sheet at 350° for 25 minutes. These may be frozen on cookie sheets, then placed in freezer bags. (Freeze before cooking; defrost before baking.)

Stuffed 'most-anything' assured those of us who enjoyed Aunt Olivia's creative cuisine of flavorful and succulent treats; we welcomed each new dish with enthusiasm, although sometimes we had to make an effort to maintain an open mind.