

# Meaty Vine Leaf Pie

From *Falastin* by Sami Tamimi and Tara Wigley

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Rolling individual vine leaves stuffed with meat and rice is wonderful—the leaves melt in the mouth and their making often signals a celebration—but it’s a time-consuming business. Here, we’ve taken a fair bit of the work out of the equation by making one big pie. Serve with any (or all) of the following: a spoonful of yogurt, a squeeze of lemon, or some flatbread.

*Getting ahead:* This can be served warm or at room temperature, the day it is made or for up to two days after.

Serves 8

## Ingredients

*Ingredients note:* Brining vine leaves—we don’t always boil our leaves before using them, but here we do. This is because the leaves and stems remain intact (rather than the stems being discarded) and we want everything to be super soft and tender when eaten.

1 x 16-oz/450g jar vine leaves in brine, drained (9 oz/250g)  
4½ tbsp/65ml olive oil  
⅓ cup/50g blanched whole almonds, roughly chopped  
⅓ cup plus 1 tbsp/50g pine nuts 4 plum tomatoes, sliced into ½-inch/1cm-thick rounds (14 oz/400g)  
1 onion, finely chopped (1 cup/150g) 3 large garlic cloves, crushed  
12¼ oz/350g ground beef  
5¼ oz/150g ground lamb  
2 tbsp tomato paste  
2½ tsp baharat (see page 335)  
1¾ cups/350g Egyptian rice or arborio rice  
Salt and black pepper 1½ cups/30g mint leaves, finely shredded  
2½ cups/50g parsley, finely chopped, plus whole leaves

## For the Sauce

¾ cups/900ml boiling water ⅓ cup/80ml lemon juice (from about 2 lemons)

1 tbsp olive oil  
Salt and black pepper  
1 cup/250g Greek yogurt (optional)

## Preparation

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Line a plate with paper towels. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Line the base of a high-sided 9 x 13-inch/23 x 33cm baking dish (or 10-inch/25cm round baking dish) with parchment paper and set aside.

Fill a medium saucepan three-fourths full of water and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Loosely unravel the clumps of vine leaves—it's fine that they're stuck together—and add them to the pan. Decrease the heat to medium and simmer for 15 minutes. Drain the leaves through a sieve and run under cold water for about 2 minutes, until the leaves are no longer warm to the touch. Set aside to drain completely.

Put 1 tbsp of oil into a small frying pan and place over medium heat. Add the almonds and cook for 2 minutes, stirring often. Add the pine nuts and cook for another 4–5 minutes, stirring frequently, until golden. Tip the nuts out onto the prepared plate and set aside.

Mix the tomatoes with 1½ tbsp of oil and spread out on the prepared baking sheet. Roast for 12 minutes, until softened but still retaining their shape. Remove from the oven and set aside until needed.

Put the remaining 2 tbsp oil into a large sauté pan and place over medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook for 5 minutes, stirring from time to time, until it is golden brown. Add the garlic and cook for another 30 seconds, then add the beef and lamb. Continue to cook for another 6 minutes or so, stirring and breaking up any lumps of the meat so that it is browned all over. Add three-fourths of the nuts, the tomato paste, baharat, rice, 2 tsp of salt, and a good grind of black pepper. Continue to cook for 2–3 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool for 10 minutes before stirring in the mint and chopped parsley.

Transfer the cooked tomatoes from the baking sheet to the prepared baking dish. Place them side by side, so that the base of the dish is covered. Next, line the base and sides of the baking dish with just fewer than half the vine leaves, shiny side down, overlapping the leaves so that there are no gaps or holes in between. Spoon in a third of the meat and spread it out in an even layer. Add another layer of leaves, overlapping them slightly to just cover the filling, then repeat the process so that you have three layers of filling in total. Finish with the vine leaves, this time letting them drape over the sides of the dish. Tuck them into the dish, like you're wrapping them around the pie, so that the filling is totally sealed.

To make the sauce, whisk together all the ingredients with 1 tsp of salt and a good grind of black pepper.

Pour the sauce very gently over the bake—it will almost cover the top—and seal the dish tightly with aluminum foil. Put the dish on a rimmed baking sheet (in case there is any leakage) and bake for 80 minutes, until the liquid is mostly absorbed and the rice is completely cooked through. Remove from the oven—don't remove the foil yet—and set aside for 20 minutes. Remove and discard the foil, then invert the dish onto a large platter or board. The best way to do this is to place a chopping board or large platter on top of the pie, then boldly flip it over so that the board or platter is at the bottom. The pie should detach itself easily from the parchment paper—don't worry if any tomatoes have stuck to the parchment, just remove these by hand and place on top of the pie. Sprinkle with the remaining nuts and a handful of parsley leaves and set aside for 15 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature, with a spoonful of yogurt, if desired.