

Whole, Stuffed Cabbage: A Course in Itself

Cabbage—a staple of peasant cooking throughout the world—is most often simply shredded, boiled briefly (*page 36*) and served as a garnish vegetable. But its size and structure offer the cook a special opportunity: the centre leaves, or heart, can be removed, producing a capacious hollow that will hold a generous amount of stuffing. The whole assemblage can then be boiled to produce a complete meal in one dish (*recipes, pages 98-99*).

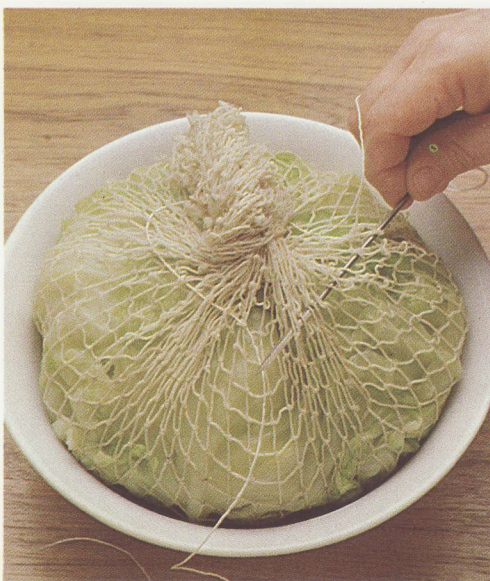
Any green or white cabbage weighing 1 kg (2 to 2½ lb) or more is suitable for such treatment. A preliminary blanching softens its outer leaves so that they can be peeled back to expose the tightly layered heart (*Step 1, far right*). When the heart is removed, it is mixed with meat, other vegetables, and herbs to make the stuffing.

Among the types of meat that might be used for stuffing, bacon and pork have a special affinity with cabbage; and their fat helps to keep the filling moist. But if you use lean meat, such as veal, or cooked meat leftovers, add a little butter, oil, pork fat or bone marrow to supply fat. The choice of vegetable additions to the stuffing is virtually limitless. In the demonstration here, parboiled, chopped chard leaves, skinned, seeded and chopped tomatoes and sautéed onions are combined with bacon and the chopped cabbage leaves. But lettuce, fresh young peas, spinach leaves or endive would also blend well with the flavour of the cabbage heart. Boiled rice binds this stuffing and gives it lightness, or you could use breadcrumbs. Similar stuffings can be used as a filling for individual cabbage, chard or vine leaves (*page 64*).

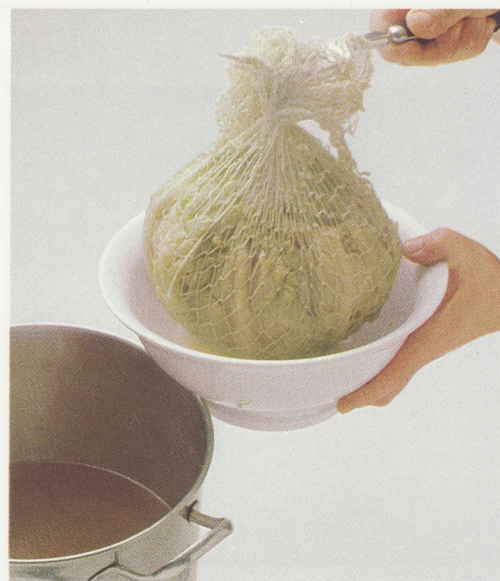
To hold the assemblage in shape while it is cooking, the stuffed cabbage should be wrapped in muslin—or, as here—enclosed in a string net. Submerged in stock or salted water, it can then be simmered safely for the two to three hours required for the cabbage and its enclosed stuffing to mingle their flavours thoroughly.



1 Removing the heart. Trim the stem of the cabbage and remove any damaged leaves (*left*). Simmer the cabbage in salted water for 10 to 15 minutes, until the outer leaves are just supple: overboiling will break them up altogether. Do not discard any leaves that may become detached. Take the cabbage out of the pot and drain it; when the cabbage is cool enough to handle, place it on a net or piece of muslin and gently pull back the outer leaves (*centre*). Cut the firm heart of inner leaves free from the stem (*right*), leaving the outer leaves still attached to the stem.



5 Tying up the net. Gather the ends of the net together and thread string through the mesh around the top with a trussing needle (*above*). Pull the string tight and tie it. Lower the cabbage into a deep pan of boiling, salted water or stock, then reduce the heat to a low simmer.



6 Completing the cooking. Leaving the lid ajar to control the simmer, cook the cabbage for 3 hours—until all the flavours are perfectly blended. Push the prongs of a fork through the top of the net to remove the cabbage from the pot.