

Kaalilaatikko Finnish Cabbage Casserole

A delicious hearty comfort food from the North

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INGREDIENTS

(makes 6-8 portions)

- 3 medium white onions
 - 3 small garlic cloves
 - ½ red chilli (optional)
 - 2 medium carrots
 - 2kg white cabbage
 - 1 litre hot water
 - 2 vegetable stock cubes
 - 1-2 tsp salt
 - 1 tsp ground black pepper
 - 1 tsp dry garlic powder
 - 2 tsp dry thyme
 - 1 tsp dry marjoram
 - 2-4 tbsp dark molasses
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- 500g minced meat (I use 50/50 pork and beef mince)
 - some salt, pepper, dry garlic powder
 - 200g rice
 - 20g butter
 - 4-5tbsp olive oil



DIRECTIONS

1. Peel onions and garlic. Then cube the onion and chilli finely and press the garlic through a garlic press or alternatively also slice finely with a knife.
2. Peel and grate the carrots.
3. Add some olive oil into a large frying pan or a wok so that the bottom is covered and start frying the onions, the garlic and chilli on medium heat. In the meantime slice the cabbage finely leaving the hard parts out. (See video)

4. Once the onions have got some color, add the carrots to them and continue frying on medium heat for about 5 minutes.
5. Now you can start adding the cabbage. If your frying pan is big enough you can add all of the cabbage at once. If your frying pan doesn't fit all of the cabbage at once you can either use two pans to speed up the process or you can just add more and more cabbage to the pan once it starts shrinking after releasing the liquid. This can however take some time. I could only fit half of the cabbage into my pan first and it took me about one hour to cook it all through.
6. Boil one litre of water and dissolve two vegetable stock cubes in it. Add about 400 ml of the vegetable stock to the cabbage. Cook the cabbage covered until it has shrunk to about half a size, mixing once in a while to ensure it cooks evenly and doesn't burn. Then add about 100 ml of stock, turn up the heat to maximum and cook while mixing continuously until the cabbage is beautifully golden. Make sure to really mix it all the time at this point so it doesn't burn. If needed turn the heat down a little.
7. Once the cabbage has a beautiful golden or almost caramel like color, season with salt, pepper, garlic powder, dry thyme and marjoram. Mix shortly, then add the dark molasses, mix shortly again and remove from heat.
8. Heat some olive oil in a frying pan over medium heat and fry the minced meat in it until almost cooked. Then season with some salt, black pepper and dry garlic powder, mix shortly and remove from heat. You can do this part while the cabbage is cooking to speed up the process.
9. Take a big oven proof casserole dish and butter it well. Then take half of the butter and add little dollops of it to the bottom of the pan. Combine the cabbage with the meat and the rice and then transfer into the casserole dish. Pour over the rest of the vegetable stock and use the rest of the butter to add little dollops on top of the cabbage. (See video)
10. Bake the cabbage casserole in 180°C at the bottom half of the oven for 60-90 minutes. Around 30 minutes cover with aluminium foil to ensure the top doesn't burn. I also mixed the top layer of the casserole a couple of times to ensure the rice that is on top also cooks through. Remove from the oven and allow to rest for about half an hour before serving.
11. A traditional way to enjoy this dish is with some lingonberry jam and cottage cheese.