

Buttered Stuffing with Celery and Leeks

Serves 8–10

I have barely changed my stuffing recipe in years. It's something that requires little-to-no innovation, in my opinion. Much like my pie crust (The Only Pie Crust), it's a recipe that I feel has been perfected in the amounts and technique. But even still, each time I make it is an opportunity for me (personally) to make The Best Stuffing I Have Ever Had. I am very competitive with myself, and I take this self-vs.-self contest very seriously.

The biggest variable seems to be the bread itself. I used to think the darker and crustier the loaf, the better, but I have since realized that sometimes the bread is too crusty to become fluffy or tender in the stuffing, so now I prefer it with something slightly softer (that still has texture). Ideally, the bread has good flavor (from nice flour, long ferment, dark crust) but isn't so dense or crusty that it becomes impossible to rip by hand.

Ingredients

1 large loaf good, crusty bread, preferably sourdough or ciabatta (about 1¼ pounds)

¼ cup olive oil

8 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus more as needed

6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

2 large leeks, white and light green parts, chopped, or 2 yellow onions, thinly sliced

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

6–8 celery stalks, thinly sliced, leaves reserved if available

½ cup dry white wine, or 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar, white wine vinegar, or sherry vinegar mixed with ½ cup water

½ teaspoon red-pepper flakes (optional)

2½ cups low-sodium chicken, turkey, or vegetable broth

3 large eggs

½ cup finely chopped parsley or celery leaves

¼ cup finely chopped chives

2 tablespoons finely chopped marjoram, oregano, or thyme

Instructions

- 1 Using your hands, tear the bread, crust and all, into 1½- to 2-inch pieces. (Alternatively, you can cut the bread with a knife, but I prefer the way the craggy bits toast and soak up the goods.) Place torn pieces on a rimmed baking sheet, and let sit uncovered at room temperature for 12 to 24 hours. If you're short on time, you can toast the chunks in a 300°F oven instead, tossing occasionally, until lightly crisped, but not browned, on the outside.
- 2 Heat oven to 375°F. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, combine olive oil and 4 tablespoons butter. Once the butter has melted, add the garlic and leeks. Season with salt and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until leeks are bright green and totally softened, 8 to 10 minutes.
- 3 Add celery, and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until bright green and tender, 4 to 6 minutes. Add white wine, and cook until reduced by about three-quarters, 3 to 4 minutes. Add red-pepper flakes, if using, and remove from heat.
- 4 Whisk together the broth and the eggs in a medium bowl. Place the bread in a large bowl (you want a lot of room for mixing, so go big), and add the leek and celery mixture, parsley, chives, and marjoram. Stir to coat so that everything is evenly distributed, trying not to totally crush the bread. Pour the egg mixture over everything, and toss a few times. Season with salt and pepper. Let sit a minute or two, and give another toss. Repeat twice until all the liquid has absorbed and evenly distributed to each and every piece of bread.
- 5 Transfer the mixture to a 2½- to 3-quart baking dish (a 9x3 pan also works), making sure not to pack it too tightly. (You want to keep the bread in the stuffing as light as possible.) Dot the top with the extra butter if desired (bad girls club), making sure to pay extra attention to the corners, where the stuffing will get the crispiest.
- 6 Cover with foil, and bake until the stuffing is sizzling at the edges and completely cooked through, 25 to 30 minutes. If it's not yet time to serve, remove the stuffing from the oven and set aside. (If you are nearly ready to serve, proceed directly to the next step and continue without pausing.)
- 7 When ready to serve, remove the foil and increase the temperature to 425°F. Bake the stuffing until crispy, crunchy, and impossibly golden-brown on top, 20 to 25 minutes. Scatter with celery leaves, if using, and serve.

DO AHEAD: Stuffing can be made all the way until the final bake a day or two beforehand, but honestly will likely take up too much space in the fridge and you're better off doing it the day of.

LEFTOVERS: The perfect leftovers. I like to reheat mine in a cast iron skillet in the oven until it gets crispier than I thought possible. Microwave is fine, but it won't crisp. It's also good cold, out of the container—hot food is over-rated.

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