

Classic Celery Stuffing

Serves 6–8

This stuffing is a perfect food and if you don't like celery, I'm sorry! Sure, you could use fennel instead, but don't leave the vegetable out altogether—it provides flavor (fantastic flavor if you ask me), but also moisture to prevent the stuffing from drying out. Don't skip the second bake—that's when the magic (crispiness) happens.

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

½ cup olive oil

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter

8 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

2 medium yellow onions, thinly sliced (or 2 large leeks, thinly sliced)

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

4 cups celery, chopped, leaves reserved for garnish if available

1 cup dry white wine

2 ½ cups low-sodium chicken, turkey or vegetable broth

3 large eggs

1 cup finely chopped parsley or celery leaves

½ cup finely chopped chives

2 tablespoons finely chopped marjoram, oregano or thyme (optional)

1. Using your hands, tear bread, crust and all, into 1 1/2- 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 chunks 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-degree oven instead, tossing occasionally, until dried out (but not browned) on the outside.

2. Heat oven to 375°. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, combine olive oil and butter. Once butter has melted, add the garlic and onions. Season with salt and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until onions are totally softened, 10 to 12 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 half, 3 to 4 minutes.

4. Whisk together broth and eggs in a medium bowl. Place bread in a large bowl (you want a lot of room for mixing, so go big), and add the egg mixture over everything and toss a few times (I like to use my hands here, but a wooden spoon is good, too). 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. Add the onion and celery mixture, parsley, chives and marjoram, if using. Stir to coat so that everything is evenly distributed, trying not to totally crush the bread.

6. Transfer mixture to a 2 1/2- to 3-quart baking dish (a 9-by-13 pan also works, so does a cast iron, so does...), making sure not to pack it too tightly. (You want to keep the bread in the stuffing as light as possible.)

7. Cover with foil and bake until the stuffing is sizzling at the edges and completely cooked through, 40–45 minutes. If it's not yet time to serve, remove stuffing from oven and set aside. (If you are nearly ready to serve, proceed directly to the next step and continue without pausing.)

8. When ready to serve, remove foil and increase temperature to 425 degrees. Bake stuffing until crispy, crunchy and impossibly golden brown on top, 20 to 25 minutes. Scatter with celery leaves, if using, and serve.

DO AHEAD: The bread can and should be torn a day or two ahead. The knife work for all the vegetables (slicing, etc) can be done the day before (store in a resealable bag, refrigerated). It can be baked the first time a few hours before dinner, then crisped up before dinner. I don't love baking it the night before, but if you are determined to do that, then go ahead!

LEFTOVERS: Re-crisping stuffing in a skillet with more butter, might even be better than the first time. Top it with fried eggs, maybe? Also great cold out of the container.

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